

Social Media and Body Image of Young Women

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## Abstract

The body image issues among women has been discussed for many years. Every century has its own ideal body image that women feel the need to follow. This capstone project focuses on the elements that have effects on young women, especially teenagers of this day and age. It analyzes the advertisements and messages that are in the media outlets such as magazines, TV and others. It also analyzes how the messages about beauty and body image targeted to women have changed throughout the years and what effects they have on women's mentality, psychology and physical health. It includes the comparison of the ideas women receive now and have during the past centuries. This project questions not only the social media outlets, but also the mentality of the society around women and their interpretation of a "perfect" look. To understand the mentality of women about messages they receive on their own body image, interviews were held with three young women. The results of the interviews explain the context of how women should look in order to fit in the category of beauty and perfection.

## Introduction

Women, especially teenagers, are on social media every day. There constantly are messages being targeted to them about how one's body should look like in order to fit in the right shape and be "beautiful." Most of the viewers who compare themselves with those images, not only get unsatisfied with their body image but also take the messages too seriously which leads them to have eating disorders and even to commit suicide. Hannah Carpenter, who was 18-years-old, committed suicide after taking many pictures of herself and desperately wanting to have a "perfect" celebrity body image ( "Redruth teen," 2015). In addition, she also suffered from eating disorders, there is no information about when she had died, but she was last seen by the doctors in 2012 ( "Redruth teen," 2015). Karen Carpenter, a famous American singer, who would strictly diet as a teenager because she thought she had a "hourglass" appearance, died at the age of 32 in 1982 from heart failure caused by anorexia. At the time, people knew very little about the illness called anorexia nervosa and her death brought public awareness about eating disorders ("The Real Reason," 2016).

Nowadays, the young generation who are on social media, specifically females, find themselves in a place where there is a lot of opportunity for comparison and competition. Before posting a simple picture, one goes through a lot of decision making on how they should look in order to be accepted by those who will see the post. A lot of female teenagers, use certain apps that can change their appearance in the picture; they can change the size of their nose, remove their pimples, make their eyes and lips big, etc. Meanwhile, others do the same not through an app, but through surgeries.

Some teens get affected not only physically, but emotionally as well. Anorexia nervosa and Bulimia are common eating disorders among those who have wrong perspectives about their body image. People who are diagnosed by them, think that they are not skinny enough to be accepted by others or themselves. Social media propagates these body image concepts and also acts as a social pressure tool which results in causing these two disorders. In addition, a lot of pictures of women are being posted on social media, most of them are celebrities, and models in commercials, and they are being depicted as the worthy women because they have the “perfect” body image.

This project will emphasize the effects of social media on young women regarding their body image and shape. It will also answer the questions of how they are affected by different media outlets.

## **Literature Review and Analysis**

Social media has been a place for people to show themselves as their best self. Nowadays, most women of different ages post their images on different social media platforms such as instagram, facebook and twitter and they see each others’ posts. Social media does not only offer people the chance to see others’ photos, but also allows them to “like” the pictures or not to “like” them, there also is a section under every picture so that the one who sees the image could comment and voice their opinion about it; this gives the viewer an opportunity to rate the picture or the person in the picture. Recently, women not only post the pictures of their face, but of their bodies as well. The media platforms are full of images of celebrities and this creates a desire in women to strive to look like them in order to feel valuable and important. Social media

has become a definer of what beauty is and how a perfect body should look like. Beauty has become an addiction in women's lives with or without being conscious about it. Some women, when going through life, make choices to be pretty and look better by making decisions on what to wear or what makeup product to put on because they choose to, but others do it because of not feeling "complete" and feeling obligated to do something about their appearance, because otherwise they won't be satisfied of their looks.

### **Dissatisfaction**

Piercy (2018) states that teenagers are the first generation who are addicted to the internet. Some of that interaction can be positive, allowing teens to find a sense of belonging and acceptance, but there is also a negative impact of social media on the concept of body image. Teenagers who are active on social media feel the need for comparing their body image with those who post pictures of their own on social media. Piercy (2018) continues saying that according to a study, teenagers who were posting more pictures on social media had a heightened self awareness about how their bodies look, which was related to feeling more negative about their body. Piercy (2018) mentions that today, teenagers are often labeled as the "selfie generation." Teenagers find themselves in a competition to have that "Perfect body" image, also, many teens receive bad comments about their body image after posting their pictures which means they are not appreciated by all of the viewers (Morin, 2018). The act of posting pictures on social media focuses on physical appearance which makes us question if self-imaging gives us confidence or lowers self-esteem, but there is no answer to that yet Piercy (2018). Teenagers turn to the internet to get approval about their body image, and also have worry and anxiety to be

accepted by the society (Knorr, 2014). Globally, social media platforms are mostly image-based and people are trying to present the best versions of themselves on social media (“Social Media and Body Image,” n.d.). As it is clear, social media and internet use is highest among people who are young. Globally, in 2014, people who were 15-17 years old spent an average of 18 hours a week online, with 91% most commonly going online for social networking (“Social Media and Body Image,” n.d.). At age 6, mostly females start to show concerns about their own weight or shape (“Body Image & Eating Disorders,” 2018).

### **Comparing Both Sexes**

Social media doesn't just affect women, but men as well. Morin (2018) states that the media affects the body image of both sexes and it has negative consequence and the ones who get affected the most are the teenagers. Piercy (2018) adds to this information claiming that girls are more vulnerable while comparing their bodies to each other's and what starts as a fun way to share experiences can turn into an obsession. The article titled “Body Image and Eating Disorders” (2018), adds that as with eating disorders, body image concerns can affect us all. According to each age, gender and culture, body image problems affect people in different ways, there are different pressures on appearance depending on one's gender. Moreover, in the Western culture, girls often feel pressure to submit to the societal appearance-ideal (to be thin, beautiful, etc.), whereas boys are often faced with social pressures and are expected to be more muscular (“Body Image and Eating Disorders,” 2018).

### **Effects of Social Media**

Social media has negative and positive influence. It offers an opportunity to create a unique identity for teenagers, but at the same time, it is dangerous for its negative impact on their body image and psychology (Nierengarten, 2017). Being able to create a bond with friends and family online, helps people to have less depression and if that bond is built between closer friends and family, it has a positive effect on mental health (Pantic, 2014). On the other hand, when there is a communication on social media with people except friends and family, then depression and the feeling of loneliness increases (Pantic, 2014). One of the negative effect examples is that girl teenagers are at a higher risk to commit suicide because of not being satisfied by their looks (Morin, 2018). The major reasons of being influenced are comparison and dissatisfaction. Knorr (2014) specifies where the idea of perfect body image comes from and claims that people are “slaves” of social media. It mentions that the body image is affected by parents, peers, and social contexts, it also tells about the worry and anxiety of teens to be accepted by society. Social media has also emotional effects on people and it is a way for them to purchase certain products (Mills, 2017). The media awakens certain emotions in people, such as the need of being loved or being a part of a community, and these feelings make people feel more vulnerable and insecure, encouraging them to take any step to change their appearance, such as buying products that advertisers sell (Mills, 2017).

### **Social Media and Mental Health**

Mental illness and negative body image are related and having a negative body image proves that the patient has psychological problems. Body dysmorphic disorder, known as BDD, is a mental illness characterized by fixation on one or more self-perceived body flaws, leading to

serious mental distress and inability to properly function socially and it is linked to negative body image (“The Impact of Eating Disorders,” n.d.). The patient exaggerates or imagines about the body image that she or he has in her mind, such as facial flaw (“The Impact of Eating Disorders,” n.d.). Anorexia and bulimia are well recognized eating disorders which make the patient think that they are extremely fat and need to lose weight while their health is in danger and they are extremely thin, some patients also take pills for losing weight and exercise regularly because they are never thin enough (“Media Influence on Body Image,” n.d.). People who have high levels of body dissatisfaction always feel that their bodies have flaws and other people’s don not, and these people are more likely to be depressed, feeling isolated, have low self-esteem and eating disorders (“Media Influence on Body Image,” n.d.). In the same article, it is also mentioned about the comparison between the positive and negative body image and while focusing on the positive body image, s/he mentions about the exact opposite of BDD’s example stating that it is about a person having true awareness of their shape and seeing the different parts of their body as they really are, as well as having complete confidence about their body, seeing their body as it is and accepting it (“Body Image & Eating Disorders,” 2018). The media is pushing people to look “perfect,” and making them strive to have the body image that are in ads (Mills, 2017). The sad reality is that those bodies are photoshopped and are not real, this action can cause the eating disorder called bulimia and binge-eating which is another disorder (Mills, 2017). Patients with eating disorders need intense therapy that helps them with issues like anxiety and depression. Additionally, they may have low self-esteem and once that is improved, their body image problems can be solved (“Media Influence on Body Image,” n.d.).

Self-esteem is a factor which is necessary for a healthy mind and a healthy lifestyle, and if it is low, then it will be connected with a variety of mental illnesses such as eating disorders, depression and addictions (Pantic, 2014). Online communication has more advantage than face-to-face communication in terms of people presenting themselves in a positive way (Pantic, 2014). Social media gives the opportunity for someone to present the best version of themselves, but real life communications do not have this opportunity, therefore, self-evaluation and self-esteem are boosted because of the choice that the social media offers (Pantic, 2014). Piercy (2018), on the other hand, opposes to this idea mentioning that the more a person spends time on choosing which photo to post and how to edit it, the more dissatisfied they become about their bodies. When teenagers post an image of themselves on social media, they become more conscious about how they look, which leads to having a negative body image (Piercy, 2018).

## **Research Questions**

One of my research questions is what challenges do young women face about their body image and beauty, and how they respond to challenges they face about them. This is the core question of my capstone topic, and all of the theories raised by the authors mentioned in the literature review come back to this question as they analyze the negative and positive effects of social media on young women. My second question is why do young women get influenced by the challenges of the idea of a perfect body image. The third and the last question is what are some examples that challenge young women to doubt their body image and change their appearance as much as needed to conform to what social media and society wants or pressures them to be.

## **Methodology**

Interviews were held with three young women between ages 19 - 22. Face to face interviews were conducted with two of them and an email interview was done with the other. As my capstone is focused on women's body image perceptions, I planned to only interview women. Two of the interviewees were American University of Armenia students and one studies online. The face to face interviews were held at the Papazian Library of AUA, the duration was 30-45 minutes each and they were audio recorded. The aim of the questions was to focus on how the participants perceived what a "perfect" and a "beautiful" body image is and how social media and society promote this idea. The questions were direct and indirect to view their approach to the idea of beauty in general. Not only they were asked about themselves but also about the society they live in and their opinions about other women's approach to beauty. The participants were asked 24 open ended questions about makeup products, plastic surgeries, advertisements, body image, dieting and beauty. The questions were about different aspects of "beauty" and "perfection" and by bringing the answers together, I was able to understand the full picture of young women's way of thinking about what they mean to them. The participants gave consent to disclose their identities in my analysis and I obtained consent from all my interviewees, one of them written, the other two verbal. (See Appendix #1 for the detailed questionnaire).

## **Research and Analysis:**

### **Interviews:**

Separate interviews were held with three young women who are active on social media, each of them had several ideas and perspectives about how they perceive beauty and a perfect

body image. In many topics, they surprisingly had the same opinions. They had several opinions about makeup, self esteem, dieting, advertising which led to a broader conversation about the vulnerability of women in certain topics. Through personal and general questions, the results were interesting and surprising. To read the questions, please see the appendix.

### **Body image and Self Esteem**

One of the patterns that were common among all the interviewees was their body image insecurities during their teenage years. All of them mentioned that they started noticing several imperfections in their body when they became teenagers and we see this in the literature review when Pierce (2018) states that teenagers are the ones who mostly get obsessed with their body image. Brown, who now is 19, claimed that she was a child who was oblivious and did not care about how other people looked at her. However, when she became 17, she started having self esteem issues, and the article of Howard (2018) mentions that teenagers who see their bodies as a negative one, their self esteem gets affected. Sargsyan, who is 22 years old, mentioned that she only became aware of her body “imperfections,” which she always had, at the age of 12-13. Gyurjyan said that when she was 7 she was fit, skinny and she thought she was pretty. Some years later, at the age of 10-11 she didn’t like the way she looked, she didn’t like the way her body looked because at that time she was chubby, and her classmates used to make jokes about her body. In addition, all of them mentioned that they never cared about their body image before and after their teenage years.

## **Social Media and Advertising**

When asked to express their opinions about advertisements in general; how they work and what messages women get from them, they gave both positive and negative feedback about it. Sargsyan and Gyurjyan think that advertising in general, is a very important tool to communicate with the audience. Sargsyan highlighted that it is very important from the marketing point of view. Moreover, Gyurjyan also believes that advertisements can be a useful tool for people to sell their products but only if they represent the product itself without sugar coating it. However, Brown believes that advertisements try to sell products people don't need. She said "sometimes, people can even feel bad about themselves seeing an advertisement about beauty, thinking they aren't good enough." Knorr (2014) mentions about this writing that people, especially teenagers, turn to the internet to feel good about their body image, and are desperate to be accepted by the society.

When they started to talk about what the media tells them about their body image, they all had the same perspective about it. Gyurjyan claimed that in most of the cases, when checking the TV and the internet, there are mostly beautiful ladies; their skin is crystal clear and their bodies are perfect. When you look at them, you might think that you want to look like them. Sargsyan said that what media shows us is that girls need to have perfect bodies, that everyone needs to be skinny to be beautiful. She continued stating that we see girls with cosmetic surgeries whether it is their breasts, lips, etc." "Not only they promote a certain body image, they send messages such as being fit to men as well," she said. Brown also continued "most of the time, the media addresses women, but it can sometimes affect men as well." This statement supports the argument of Morin (2018) who claimed that not only women, but men get affected from social

media as well. Brown on the other hand, stated that the media always “sways” people to believe that they aren’t good enough without some kind of product and in any case, the media always lies in some form or another. We see this in the article written by Mills (2017) when it states that media affects people emotionally so that they can purchase products.

### **Women and Makeup**

When they were asked questions about makeup, all of them responded positively about it, saying that makeup highlights the beauty of a woman, and if it makes a woman confident, then there is no problem using it. They surprisingly used the same sentences about women wearing makeup, stating that excessive makeup is not necessary for a woman, natural makeup is more preferable. They specified how they definitely are not against makeup, but they actually use it often and they prefer applying less amount of makeup. Brown said “I do not appreciate pounds of makeup on a person, because it takes away natural beauty.” On the other hand, Sargsyan believes that everything is beautiful when it is done within limits; she argued about how excessive makeup does not give the impression of a natural look which is not considered beautiful for her. Gyurjyan also agrees with this idea and stated that natural makeup is better than putting on excessive makeup; she applied the concept of applying too much makeup on the lifestyle of the Armenian women claiming that most of them wear unnecessary amount of makeup during a normal day. “You don’t need to look like you are going to a party in the morning,” she said.

According to the reactions of my interviewees, natural beauty is seen as an essential part of a woman’s physical appearance and certain actions of theirs can change that image which leads

to having a “negative” image. The interesting fact which stood out was that applying less amount of makeup is considered to be “natural” beauty but the woman who wears makeup doesn’t become “naturally” pretty, but becomes prettier because of the makeup.

### **Beauty According to The Media.**

Again, all the interviewees had similar ideas about what the media tells them about having a “perfect” body image. Sargsyan said that there are too many messages on social media, and that there are both positive and oppressive messages about beauty. She emphasized that nowadays, media tells women to work on their physical appearance whether to do cosmetic surgery, to exercise a lot and always have a good body shape. However, she said she often notices encouraging phrases on the media as well, such as “if you find yourself beautiful, others will too,” and thinks that from time to time, the media encourages women to love themselves and their body and be pleased with their shape. Moreover, for Gyurjyan, the internet is divided into two sections. She receives two extremely different body image messages on media; she either sees images of various women are sexy and wearing beautiful clothes, or very simple girls who are always sending body positivity messages. She gets messages about how women should strive to be like these two different types of women. About the society and people in general, Brown pointed out a quote she had heard that says “people say beauty is about looking good, having perfect hair, clothes, makeup, while I agree this can be a true statement, it is only half true;” she agrees with this quote and thinks that taking care of ourselves is necessary, but according to her, that is not the complete definition of beauty and looking out for the body does not make the person become completely beautiful.

### **Messages About Dieting:**

My interviewees receive several messages about dieting according to the media outlets they follow, and the people they surround themselves with. Sargsyan follows several fitness pages on facebook, and she mostly sees quotes like “one must be skinny because that is beautiful,” or “ If you have an aim, your aim should be becoming skinny.” These quotes that are sometimes perceived “motivational” are not so in reality and make a lot of young women including Sargsyan think about their weight. It is not unusual for women to feel like they need to be a certain size (“New Sporting Femininities” n.d.). “I step on the scale once in the morning and once in the evening. I eat very little throughout the day, to stay fit,” Sargsyan said. Moreover, Gyurjyan is surrounded by friends who are continuously on a diet and always suggest her to diet. She has been a witness to a situations where one woman bullied the other, she said “I hate it when people bully others because of being fat, those people may not show it but they are hurt inside. Some women cannot lose weight because of hormonal or other issues, so they shouldn’t be judged.”

### **Plastic Surgeries:**

Plastic surgeries are very common among women in general, the interviewees had both negative and positive approach about this topic. Brown stated that she has not undergone any plastic surgeries because she has never felt the need to do it as she is satisfied with her looks. She does not like plastic surgeries and she feels like every person is created for a purpose and thinks that someone changing themselves does not fulfilling that purpose. However, she thinks that doing plastic surgeries for a serious medical condition is not a problem at all. She continued that she feels bad for women who do plastic surgeries because she thinks they do not love themselves

enough and want to change themselves in order to be beautiful; she believes that usually when someone has plastic surgery, it is because of thinking that they are not good enough. She said “I believe all women are naturally beautiful.” Gyurjyan, on the other hand, highlights that too many people are having plastic surgeries lately, and mostly nose jobs. She believes that if the person is able to feel confident with their body image after the surgery, or if they are doing it for medical purposes, then she does not think there is a problem in doing it. However, she thinks that there are people who do plastic surgeries because they see others doing it and they want to imitate them. She adds that doing it just because they have the capability to is not a good approach to have surgeries. Gyurjyan thinks they are being a bad example for other people, because when they see these people, they may feel that their physical appearance is not good enough and be unsatisfied with their looks. She insisted that overdoing something may not be a good decision for someone’s health. Sargsyan’s believes that the media always promotes women to change their appearance and have plastic surgeries, and that advertisements can actually work and push women to do anything, however, she thinks that receiving the message depends on the person and may not be accepted by everyone.

**My Interpretation:**

According to my literature review, teenagers are the most influenced by the media because of the psychological and physical changes they go through. The results of the interviews confirm this point, but also show that women who have passed their teenage years still struggle with body image issues and aim to become thinner. Also, the interviews prove that the media is always trying to promote certain body images for women to make them fit into it, and this goal is set to

only sell products that they advertise. What I found interesting and important is that women who bully others for not having a “perfect” body image are actually the ones who receive strive to have the body image of the women who are photoshopped in magazines and other media outlets; they believe that those pictures should be the ultimate goal of every woman. Young women are affected in one way or another; they may not have beauty insecurities but have body image insecurities, or vice versa.

## **Document Analysis**

### **Body Image History**

During 1900s, the body image of women were aimed to be “round, pear shaped.” Venus created figurines that had curves and large breasts. From 1930s to 1950s the body image was changed and eating disorders started to take place in women’s, especially in models’, lives. Idol that women would follow were actresses like Marilyn Monroe and her body image was seen as the one to be strived for. In 1960s - 1970s, women stopped wearing corsets and the preferred body type was a young and a skinny one. In 1980s - 1990s, the body image goal was to have a skinny, but at the same time a healthy body type. Also, anorexia and obesity started to become famous terms at that time; as pictures of skinny models were seen everywhere on social media, but obese women’s images were being put out there simultaneously. In 2000s, the ideal body image was defined by what the social media told children and youth, who would look up to images posted there to see what society accepted as a perfect body image, so that they can change theirs in order to fit the expectations of the society. In 2010s, women started to see different body image examples on social media, and according to the Common Sense Media Survey, a large number of

teenagers get stressed about how they appear in images posted on social media (Howard, 2018). This is also highlighted in the literature review by Piercy (2018) that emphasized how teenagers get self aware about how their bodies look when posting pictures on social media. Howard (2018) also states that social media gives negative body image ideas to teenagers, and as it is mentioned in the literature review, this leads to mental health issues among the media users, which includes anorexia and bulimia ("The Impact of Eating Disorders on Body Image," n.d.). In addition, "when that body type is different from the one girls and young women have, they can be vulnerable to low self-esteem," (Howard, 2018). While Pierce (2018) mentions that teenagers of today's age are named as the "selfie generation," Howard (2018) writes that the idea of "selfie" is dangerous, especially since Youtube and Instagram are more used by people nowadays and as photos and videos of everyone's bodies, not just the celebrities', is put out there. Another reason women who are both young and old, have body image issues is because of everything they see on another media outlet which is the Television (Hoover, 2011).

## Women Portrayed in Magazines (Beauty & Body Image)



Figure 1



Figure 2

Figure 1 and 2: Images portrayed in magazines in 1995, showing women how to dress and act when they work at home.

In 1995, an article in a magazine was published with a title that reads “Good House Wife’s Guide” (Chang, 2015). It was about how women should have worked at home and how pretty and flawless they should have looked when their husbands come home from work. If we pay close attention to the pictures which are included in this article, women are skinny and are dressed in a certain way to look pretty to their husbands. While these women are at home, most of them are wearing dresses instead of pajamas, and shoes with high heels instead of slippers. All the women portrayed in the pictures have their hair and makeup done. In addition, some of them

are decorated with jewelry such as earrings and necklaces. In the instructions, it says “Touch up your makeup, put a ribbon in your hair and be fresh-looking.”(Chang, 2015).

The message directed to women to look beautiful and classy not only is given through pictures, but also is insisted by words in the captions. These pictures are far from reality. This article is pressuring women to look perfect while working at home which is one of the tiring activities one can do. The message here is to look flawless to please husbands, but also to teaching women how to put a balance between their looks and work at the same time. The question is, does this mean that there is something wrong with a woman when she looks like a mess when working? Would husbands love their wives less when she doesn't have makeup, high heels and a dress on? Or would they not be pretty without having makeup on or being dressed up?



Figure 3

Figure 3: An American singer's, Faith Hill's, difference before and after the photoshop for a magazine cover.



Figure 4

Figure 4: Beyoncé's photoshopped magazine cover image.

When we look at the magazines today, we see other messages being imposed on women. They promote other body image ideas and unintentionally instruct women to have a certain body type

in order to be “perfect.” Women are photoshopped in most of the magazines and as a result, they look like totally different people. In figure 3, Faith Hill, who is a famous American singer, is shown to be skinnier and younger than her actual look. Her arm are made thinner, her back is straightened, the wrinkles under her eyes are removed and her skin and hair are made lighter. On the left corner of the magazine cover, it says “Skinny Pills, yes they work!” The magazine is telling the viewer that this woman has taken those pills and that is the reason of her “perfect” beauty. In a word, the magazine is lying. Hill is unnaturally skinny and the magazine wants the reader to put their hope on something that is not real. A message written on the magazine cover other than the pills is to “look & feel Your Hottest.” By using these words, they want the readers (women, as they are the target) to believe that they should be as skinny as this woman is to be “hot” and “sexy.” In addition, as it is mentioned in the literature review, the media outlets show people that they need to be skinny and this can lead them to have eating disorders, and unfortunately, what they are striving to have is not real, it’s all photoshopped (Haglund, 2014).

When we compare the messages sent to black and white women, there are several repetitive ideas that we see in many magazine covers. Although there are a lot of magazine covers with white women with tanned skin, the focus is mostly on being skinny and young appearing, black women, on the other hand, need to have tan skin instead of black, and be skinny as well, according to these messages. Seeing this type of body image in magazines makes the reader think that they are not black, they are just tan, which today is known as a desirable skin color for women.

### **Women’s Clothing History.**

Clothing, before the depression era of the 1920s, was made to only fit people (Nguyen, 2015). The women's clothing history started when a study was made and was funded by the government of the U.S. This study was done for the clothing industry and to see what the size of an 'Average American Woman' was, and they took the sizes of nearly 15,000 women. When they aimed to have an average size, they found out that there were many different sizes (Nguyen, 2015). In 1958, the government constantly tried to identify the sizes of women's bodies, and at that time, Marilyn Monroe's body size was with a "35-inch (88cm) bust and 22-inch (55 cm) waist," and during that period of time, this size was viewed as size 12 (40-inch bust, 34-inch waist), but now it is size 6 (32-inch bust, 25-inch waist) or less (Nguyen, 2015). In 1970, Brigitte Bardot was a famous French actress and was the first 0-size model, which would be a size 8 at our times (Nguyen, 2015). In 2001, Queen Latifah was labeled as size 18, but now she would be considered size 14 (42-inch bust, 36-inch waist) and finally, Christina Hendrick who is another famous woman, she was considered as size 28, but that is equivalent to a size 14 (Nguyen, 2015). When we take a general look at the sizes of these women, all of the label sizes are changed now to a lesser number. Sizes change, and the beauty standards of the society change. In Brigitte Bardot's case, she was famous and viewed to have the perfect body size, but now she would not be considered skinny because she would be considered as size 8 (33-inch bust, 25-inch waist). Marilyn Monroe, who was seen followed as the one who had a perfect body image in her times (Howard, 2018) would be considered "fat" in this day and age because the media, especially magazines, is telling women that being skinny should be their goal.

### **The Zero Size**

Many women define the “perfect” body image as having a zero size body. Since many of the famous women on TV are portrayed as having small waist and thin body, therefore, the audience automatically thinks that attaining a body like theirs will make them acceptable and pretty; the size zero has become their goals and they desire to have this body shape thinking that once they have the size of famous women, especially movie stars and performers, they will be achieving their goals and be beautiful on the outside (“New Sporting Femininities” n.d.). What they don’t get, however, is the fact that famous people do not naturally have those skinny bodies, they also are forced to eat less than they should and are put under pressure to lose weight (“New Sporting Femininities” n.d.) . Research shows that dissatisfaction with body image is one of the reasons that leads to the development of anorexia (“Body Image & Eating Disorders,” 2018). As a consequence of not eating enough, many women may become unhealthy because of being obsessed with how much they eat and this may lead to serious diseases such as eating disorders (“New Sporting Femininities” n.d.).



Figure 5

Figure 5: This billboard shows Isabelle Caro who had anorexia nervosa while being a model. It was put in one of the streets of Milan in 2007, and was made to raise awareness about anorexia which was promoted by fashion industries.

The idea of being skinny became so popular that the Nolita campaign decided to show Isabelle Caro's body to the world. Isabelle Caro was a French model and actress, who allowed her body to be shown to many people (Grimes, 2010). Caro was 59 pounds (27 kilograms) and died at the age of 28 in 2017 because of anorexia and she mentioned that she had this illness since she was 13 because of having a "difficult childhood" (Cartner-Morley, 2007). This advertisement was put out in Milan in 2007 and aimed at bringing awareness to what the fashion industry promoted and it shocked the Milanese people who viewed this ad in a street (Cartner-Morley, 2007). Caro highlighted that she was involved in this campaign "to show young people how dangerous this illness is" (Cartner-Morley, 2007). This billboard with the headline "No-Anorexia" was shot by Oliviero Toscani and was made to raise attention towards anorexia and bring awareness of a disease "caused in most cases by the stereotypes imposed by the world of fashion" the owner of the Nolita campaign mentioned (Cartner-Morley, 2007).

## **Women Presented Online**

### The Kylie Jenner Challenge:

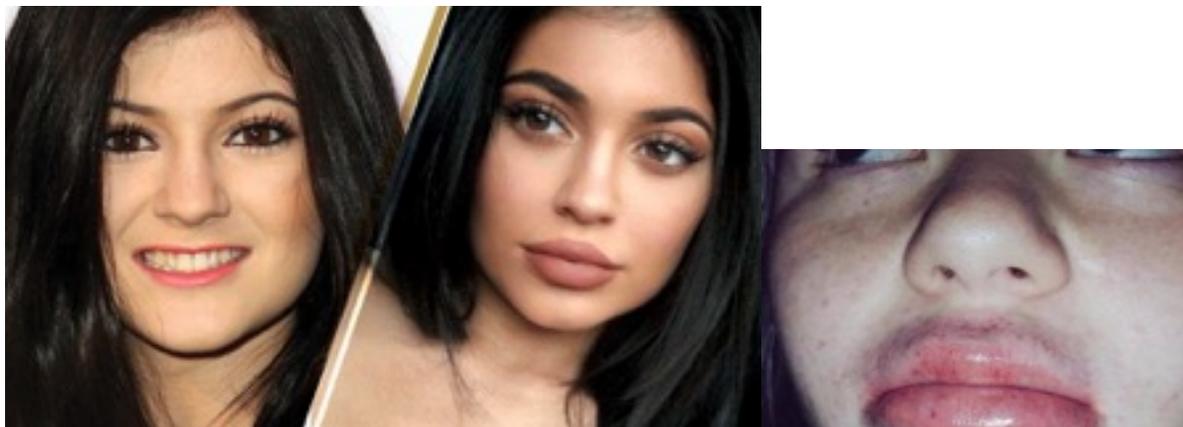


Figure 6

Figure 7

Figure 6: The images of Kylie Jenner show the difference of the size of her lips before and after.

Figure 7: An image of a teenager who tried the “Kylie Jenner Challenge” and had an allergic reaction which inflamed her lips as a result.

The celebrity Kylie Jenner was born in 1997 in California, and is famous due to taking part in the reality TV show called “Keeping Up With the Kardashians” with the rest of her family members including Kim, Kourtney, Khloe and Kendall (“Kylie Jenner,” 2019). Her fame grew after the challenge was spread on the internet which is called the “Kylie Jenner Challenge” (“Kylie Jenner Challenge,” 2019). As Jenner was known for her big lips, the Kylie Jenner Challenge was a trend in 2014 followed by many who wanted to have bigger lips for a short amount of time (“Kylie Jenner Challenge,” 2019). The challenge was to use a shot glass, put it around the lips, and then to suck it for some time so that the lips would plump and get bigger than its original size (Mulshine, 2015). The fans of Kylie Jenner who were mostly teenagers, started to take on this challenge and post their pictures on social media platforms (Mulshine, 2015). The challenge went viral and it got so famous that the term “Kylie Lips” was added on the Urban dictionary in

2014 (“Kylie Jenner Challenge,” 2019). After this trend, Jenner rose in fame and in 2015, she was chosen as one of the most “influential” teen celebrities (Spollen, 2017).

Moving to the analysis, Jenner is one of the celebrities followed online and her every step is taken into consideration. Social media platforms make it easier for her fans to communicate with her and keep up with what she does as she posts her pictures daily. It makes Jenner reachable for them at any time, and she in turn can transfer her messages to her followers. According to Pantic (2014), one of the authors mentioned in the literature review, having the option to communicate on the internet has more advantages than the face to face communication and social media can boost the confidence of the person who presents themselves online. However, not every message has positive effect on fans. When looking at figure 6, there is a major difference in the size of Jenner’s lips compared to before. When analyzing the reactions of her fans, it is clear that when Jenner’s lip size got bigger, her fans wanted to have similar facial features and have lips like her’s. Unfortunately, changing the size of the lips by sucking a glass is more dangerous than having plastic surgeries for it; despite of being an easy challenge, it led many teenagers to have injured and bleeding lips like the girl in figure 7 after the attempt (Mulshine, 2015). The reason why this challenge was mostly done by teenagers was because most of her fans are teenagers, but also because teens become the most obsessed with their body image (Piercy, 2018). The images posted by the celebrities are taken very seriously by teenagers, and the teenage years are the exact time pattern in which a person develops their identity and becomes open to take risks and change their appearance, and online communication can have negative impact on their psychology and body shape (Nierengarten, 2017).

## **Limitations and avenues for future research**

One of the limitations of this research projects is the limited information. Certain cases about stories on the internet were examined and conclusions were made based on the stories shared about certain celebrities and individuals. Moreover, the sources that this research was based on were general information about body image and diseases that are caused by body image issues. In this project, there could not be included all aspects of beauty and body image effects; the cases that are included are the ones the most discussed and popular, but there definitely are other minor cases which are also important to be considered.

It is true that I interviewed three people who willed to openly share their opinions about their own body image and about cosmetics, dieting, plastic surgeries, and other topics, but clearly, it is impossible to reach out to every single person who has ideas to share about body image and know their perspectives about it. The limitation about interviews is not being able to do it with many participants. Since not many people want to share their personal struggles and experiences with an interviewer who is a stranger for them, it is not ethical for the interviewer to force the participants to have an interview. Forcing someone to speak about their struggles can have damages on their mental health which can lead do many psychological problems. This limits the opportunity to collect too many cases and to have a general overview on the topic.

For further research, surveys can be conducted among people of all ages especially teenagers. The surveys should be done online or in any other form to raise awareness about this topic. Moreover, psychologists should take into consideration the teenagers who cannot afford going to therapies and provide specific free sessions for teenagers; this would be beneficial for the teens who do not have the chance to discuss their issues with others. Certain psychologists or

volunteers should visit community centers like schools, and give them speeches or presentations about the body image and how to accept their body image and to appreciate and accept their identities; this can decrease the suicide rates and the mental and physical health of many teenagers.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, this research is the result of analyzing the aspects which make women doubt their body image. It is also made to bring awareness about the dangers of the social media messages. Many women believe that in order to be called “beautiful,” they have to get rid of their physical and facial features which are parts of their ethnicity and origin and become like any famous person, such as Kylie Jenner, Faith Hill or Beyonce. With this mentality, they decide to modify parts of their bodies through plastic surgery or starve themselves until they are fit enough and are able to reach the standards of the society. By doing so, they lose their identities and become someone that they are not.

Facebook, Instagram, and similar media outlets are the ones which influence the confidence and self esteem of women. Most of the time, people post their pictures in their best form and shape, covering their “flaws.” When a woman sees another’s photo on one of these platforms, they think that it is an authentic representation of the person’s looks, forgetting the fact that the person may have edited the entire photo before posting it. Moreover, these certain ideas do not come to mind naturally, but from social media messages through ads that have slogans about what a good body image should look like. In addition, the society retains these motives by believing in them and telling exchanging them among themselves. This causes the person to feel less than and not good

enough and become self conscious which leads them to take different actions that are not healthy, and eventually develop diseases such as anorexia, bulimia and others.

The images and messages presented on social media are taken seriously by many young women who aim to own the bodies which are presented online. As a consequence, this creates psychological pressure on them to meet certain expectations. Therefore, one should be aware of this and make a conscious choice whether they want to follow the norms of the society or accept their body image the way it is.

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## Appendices

### Appendix #1 - Body Image and Beauty Questionnaire :

- What do you think about Advertisement? (in general)
- What does the media tell you about your body?
- Did you pay attention to your body when you were a child?  
Did that change when you became a teenager?
- What do you think about makeup?  
Do you go out without makeup? Do you feel bad about yourself when you come out without makeup?  
How much makeup do you use? (every day, once a week, etc.)  
What do you think about makeup when other women use it?
- What products do you use for you hair, hands, etc. ? Do you use different products for each of them?  
Do you pay attention to beauty products?  
How do you make decisions about purchasing products/beauty products?  
Why do you use these products? Why these particular products?
- Do you catch yourself looking at mirrors when you walk in streets? What do you think about yourself when you do that?
- What messages do you get about dieting?  
Do you diet a lot? How many times a month or a year?  
Do you diet to fit into a dress?

- How would you describe what beauty is for you?
- What are the attributes of beauty for you?
- What messages do you get about what beauty should be?

## Appendix #2

Consent Form was taken.

### CONSENT FORM

**PURPOSE:** I have been informed that the purpose of the project is to understand how the capstone project offers an opportunity to explore the connections between public and personal opinions about body image. Within the bigger context of the project the individual life story interview collected by Sera Yeretian is meant to shed light on how the media and the opinions of the society affect women's body image.

**PROCEDURES:** I understand that the interview will be conducted at AUA. As a participant I will be asked to explore how I think about what a perfect woman means and how media shapes my thoughts on how a woman should look like in order to look "beautiful." I have been informed that interviews will take approximately 20 minutes, however the participants are free to stop at any time, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the project at any given point. I understand that if I wish to extend the interview for more than 20 minutes, I will be provided that opportunity.

**RISKS AND BENEFITS:** I understand that this interview may involve the sharing of my personal experience, which will be treated with the utmost care and consideration.

**CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION:** As a participant, I will have access to all the recorded and transcribed data for verification purposes. Throughout the project, if and when the material produced is in Armenian, I will have the opportunity to review and verify the English translations.

I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time without negative consequences.

I understand that the data from this project may be published in print or digital format for academic purposes.

In terms of **identification and reproduction** of my interview (**please choose one**):

I agree to **disclose my identity**. I understand that my identity may be revealed in any publications or presentations that may result from this interview. I understand that I may mask the identities of other persons appearing in my narratives if I so choose.

**OR**

\_\_ I understand that my participation in this study is **confidential** and I will be given a pseudonym to conceal my identity. I understand that I may mask the identities of other persons appearing in my narratives if I so choose.

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT. I FREELY CONSENT AND VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

INTERVIEWEE:

NAME (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

INTERVIEWER:

NAME (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_