

Everyday, girls are bombarded by images of societal beauty standards. These standards change women emotionally and physically. About five percent of the women in the world naturally possess the bodies portrayed in social media and yet we all strive to maintain these unrealistic bodies with diets and unhealthy decisions. In my research, I explored the origins of our current beauty standards and its connection to the inequity of women in leadership roles.

While collecting my photos, I began to categorize them by emotion, memory or repetition. Choosing photos of women that influenced my life and research. As a whole, my collages work together like a quilt. I chose the medium of collage because women might find insecurities while reading advertisements or looking at photos on social media. I chose photos and colors that convey feelings or memories of longing, nostalgia for a time or state of being. I wanted to create this feeling because we all can relate this feeling while looking at images of others.

The process of collage making is also a transformation, a message that in life we all transform because of our minds and environments. For me, the collages with the children in space remind me to be silly and light hearted in challenging times. We are all human and we should give love to our souls and hearts instead of hatred or disappointment.

Grace V.

**Abstract:**

This essay is about how the media portrays women and its connection to the lack of women shown in leadership roles. The essay also includes analysis of the media and what advertisers want women and men to see and believe in society. The process of the essay and research involves a personal journey of being media literate, finding empowerment and breaking the mental barrier of beauty and societal standards.

Five percent of women in the world naturally possess the bodies shown in these photos. Yet I see approximately ninety percent of these bodies on my Instagram feed persuading me to eat or not eat and dress a certain way (Berninger). I remember when I was just entering middle school and I came across an advertisement for mascara on TV. The ad was trying to sell this mascara as having a “special formula” that extends one’s eyelashes longer and fuller. I was amazed and mesmerized at the same time. I looked over to my mom who was sitting on the couch next to me and asked, “Should I get that? Does it really work? Her eyelashes are really long?” Before she could answer, I jumped off the couch and ran into the bathroom to examine my eyelashes. I pulled my body over and across the basin of the sink to look at my face. My face was so close to the mirror that the steam from my breath was fogging up the glass. I tilted my head and lifted up my right eyelid with my right index finger. I thought to myself, “Not long enough. I wish I was naturally pretty and had long and full lashes like that girl.” I went back to the couch, sat down and sighed. My mom looked at me and said, “Those lashes aren’t real; they’re fake extensions. The TV will tell you your lashes will get longer but it won’t. Trust me I’ve tried it.” I didn’t believe my mom at all. Companies can’t lie to you? Isn’t that illegal? I continued to not believe my mom and began a journey that I later found out to be a confusing and disappointing mind game.

I encountered a related problem in my early high school years while with some friends. It was Friday night; we felt invincible and were on our way to a fancy sushi restaurant. We devoured the appetizers and all silently agreed it was not enough. As we began to put down our chopsticks, one of my friends, Mary, sighed and said, “You know today is just one of those self esteem days.” She began to unravel her thoughts and we listened. She talked about when you just feel down on yourself about clothes and how you look. She then called on the responses that she would get when she spoke vocally about how she felt. People would say, “You’re beautiful! What are you talking about?” or “You’re beautiful inside and out.” Mary took a moment to catch her breath and said next, “You can say all these things to me and tell me I’m beautiful but where’s the evidence? Why can’t I see what you’re seeing?” One of my other friends responded to the questions and said that if she looked into the mirror the evidence was there. Mary didn’t look amused or a least bit inspired by the answer. My other friend said the thing that helps her feel beautiful is to compare herself to other women that have “worse” body types or related issues such as scaring. It was my turn to say something, but I couldn’t think of anything that wasn’t the clichéd answer that Mary was talking about. I just sat there and listened to everyone’s opinions because I didn’t know my opinion on this topic. Why didn’t I know my own opinion on this topic? I’m a woman in this society; shouldn’t I know where I lie with myself and the issues of my sisterhood? I’ve been constantly surrounded by the media my whole life that I considered the exposure normal and didn’t think I needed my own opinion on societal beauty and power standards. I was unknowingly brainwashed by advertisements and by social media.

After dinner when I went back home, I began to feel worthless about helping my friend feel better about herself because I couldn’t even make myself feel better. How can I break this barrier of unhealthy beauty standards? How can I learn to empower myself? How did this negativity on women body image originate? What are we doing today that can change?

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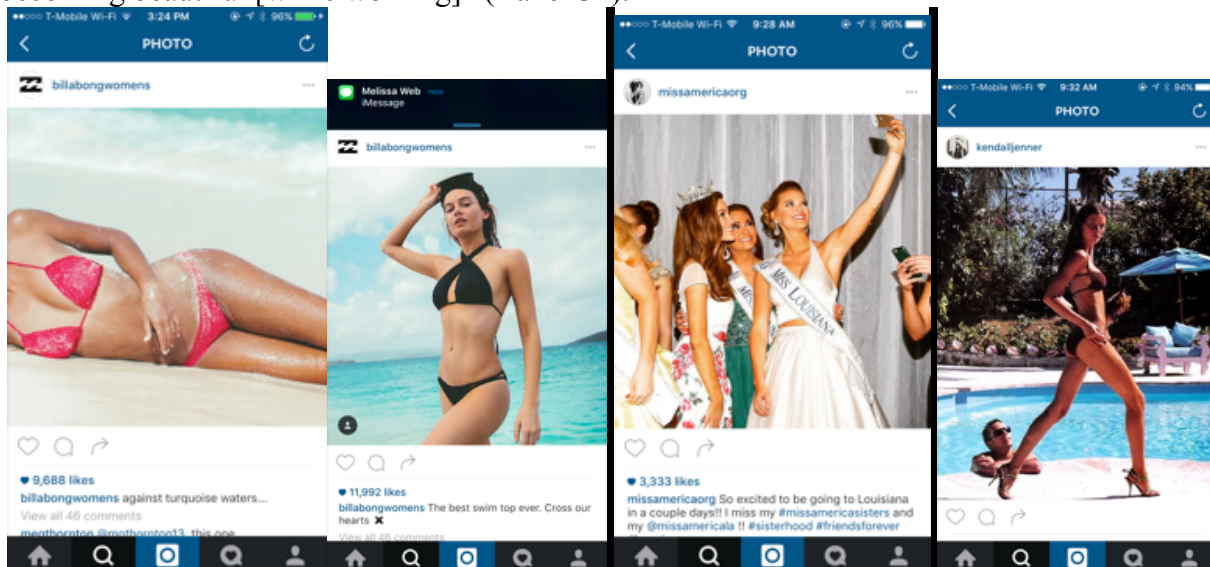
I would first like to tackle this difficult and sensitive issue by answering the questions from *Things No One Will Tell Fat Girls* written by Jes Baker: “1) Why are women the ones we often talk about when it comes to body image? 2) Where does our ‘thin is always better’

mentality come from and 3) Where did the perpetuation of the ideal body we see today start (Baker 29)?”

To answer the first question, we have to examine the history of farming and the development of patriarchy (Baker 30). As farming became more prominent and there was enough food for families to have more children, women were expected to bear more children to become future farmers (Baker 31). Historians believe this was the beginning of patriarchal rule when women began to be seen as property and more valued as virgins (Baker 31). Virginity was a promise that “the woman hadn’t ‘given’ any farmers to someone else” (Baker 31). This mindset continued from generation to generation, leaving women still powerless, controlled and objectified. This gender injustice that we saw during the farming period and see today in our own media “is why, in part, marketing and advertising specifically targets [women’s bodies] and their role in society” (Baker 31).

Body image began to evolve when the “thin is always better” mentality was created. This mentality was created in the 1800s when food transportation became widespread and normal. During this time the wealthy had no problem in having access to food or maintaining their large body weight. In fact, having a large body meant one was healthy, wealthy and “had enough to eat” (Baker 31). But when the poor started gaining access to more food because of the transportation improvement, the physical gap between the rich and poor began to close. In order for the upper class to “differentiate themselves and reclaim their social power over the lower classes, and they did this partially by idealizing thinness. Adding to this, people romanticized the frail bodies of several European artists at the time who had tuberculosis, and soon Americans were grabbing onto the NEW ideal: slenderness as a form of class [and social] distinction” (Baker 32).

This unrealistic body that we preserve today became an ideal during World War II when the soldiers returned home and women were forced back to their lives of raising children and being housewives (Baker 34). But with their new sense of freedom and potential, women began to “leave vacuuming, cooking dinner, and helping with homework for office work” (Baker 34). Advertisers had to find a new angle that would get their women consumers to continue buying their products so they focused on the terms of beauty and youth. These advertisers promoted “instead of being a heroine by raising children, you could now reach the same idol status by becoming beautiful [while working]” (Baker 34).



**Keep your BEAUTY on duty!**

**Give your skin Ivory care, Doctors advise!**

**Defensive care for DRY SKIN!**  
Keep your skin looking its loveliest even when you're busiest. Give it this correct care approved by skin specialists.

1. Use a mild soap. Try skins tend to be sensitive, so irritate easily. What gentle care could your beauty have than that advised by doctors for baby's sensitive skin. New Ivory soap!
2. Use lukewarm water, never hot. And a soft washcloth. Fine Ivory's quick, luxurious lather, it's so mild. Then talcumum rinses.
3. Apply lightly a little cold cream. For summer's probably left your skin flaky-dry. And remember this Ivory contains no dye, medication or strong perfumes that might be irritating. Get Giant Size Ivory. Most convenient for toilet use.

**OILY SKIN! Take the offensive!**  
You can recognize that cool, lovely look for your complexion. But your skin needs special care, persistent care. Skin specialists approve this cleansing method!

1. Cleanse thoroughly. Wash Ivory's thick, lovely lather well into your face and neck, using a soap washcloth and lukewarm water.
2. Rinse well. Warm water, then cold. Repeat your Ivory lathering. Go after those oily areas: your hairline, forehead, nose, chin. Then another rinse.
3. Do this cleansing as often as 5 times daily. See how delightfully smooth and fresh Ivory's milky lather leaves your skin. Compare the low price of Giant Size Ivory with that of your present beauty soap.

Most doctors advise New Ivory Soap for your skin, and baby's, used all other brands of soap together.

**99% PURE IT FLOATS**

"Baby-care" is Beauty-care, use **New Velvet-suds IVORY**

*W. H. Corporation*  
*Sept 42*

**BEAUTY**  
*answers the call . . .*

**But . . . a smart W.A.A.F still keeps that Schoolgirl Complexion**

The best-looking women in uniform are those who take care of their skin. A daily bath with Palmolive is a natural beauty treatment, for its rich, veivety, olive-oil lather soothes and beautifies as it cleanses—keeps you "schoolgirl complexion" all over.

**PALMOLIVE**

*31d. Including Tax*

These ads are examples of marketers making the connection between “beauty” and the workforce. The ad on the left states that a workwoman’s responsibility is not only in her work but also in her skincare. The allure of purchasing the product also comes from the phrase, “Doctors advise!” The ad on the right states that “beauty” answers the work call not the woman’s work ethic or skill. In the same ad, the word “smart” has a smaller font and bold than the word “beauty” and a W.A.A.F (Women’s Auxiliary Air Force) is only smart when she uses and buys Palmolive. A woman is never smart or capable because of her intelligence or abilities but by how beautiful she is and what products she uses. This formula that advertisers created “in the pursuit of money [is the reason why many of us women are still imprisoned in our bodies]” (Baker 35).

Even though these advertising tactics were used back then, many businesses still use similar strategies in order to make their revenue. And as the topic of unhealthy beauty standards gain awareness, marketing teams use this realization to their advantage. For example, “when women [decide] to liberate themselves from the overly feminine look, magazines [endorse] the ‘nude look’ so women [can] look ‘natural’ while still subscribing to the standard of pretty that they [are] trying to avoid” (Baker 35). Advertisers don’t lift their fingers to benefit the improvement of female self-esteem but instead use our found strength and empowerment from years of oppression to make money. How degrading is that? Why are we facing the consequences when we’re trying to expose the media for what it’s really doing to women? How can we move on from this ongoing oppression and continue to empower ourselves despite the roadblocks?

We’re facing these consequences because advertisers don’t like it when their “system” is jeopardized by the true upper hand (real women that are media literate). And I don’t believe the “system” will change despite our efforts. I’ve come to realize that it won’t make a difference if women try to persuade the media their rights or how women should be perceived because

advertisers will just “[introduce] a new domination technique to compensate for each of our newfound powers” (Baker 35). But what will make a difference that women are already doing is changing and being aware of their ideas and thoughts on the unhealthy beauty/societal standards. Women such as the author Jes Baker wrote *Things No One Will Tell Fat Girls*; she centers her work on “embracing a body-positivity worldview, changing perceptions about weight, and making mental wellness a priority” (Davison). In *Things No One Will Tell Fat Girls*, Baker cites from *The Beauty Myth* written by another avid conversationalist Naomi Wolf. Wolf is also the author of *Fire with Fire* which is about *The New Female Power and How It Will Change the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. These are just a couple of revolutionaries that are trying to make a difference for women in this standardized world. However, being a revolutionary doesn’t always mean making a scene, it can also mean acknowledging that there is a problem and conversing about it.

Unhealthy beauty standards aren’t the only issue women have been trying to solve but also the lack of women in leadership roles. Women that are trying to break through an industry mostly filled with men such as film directing or producing are discriminated because people or in this situation men want to keep the power that they have by privilege (Bbcnews). For example, Katherine Hardwicke author of the *Twilight* series says, “‘Nobody says, I’m not gonna hire a female director.’ On their list there’s just twenty-five names, and none of them are women” (Miss Representation). This means that men won’t explicitly say they won’t hire women directors, they just choose not to or not to challenge what they know (Miss Representation). Unfortunately Hollywood “is run on one assumption...that women will watch stories about men, but men won’t watch stories about women” (Miss Representation). In media as you go up the ladder “fewer and fewer women and people of color exist...which means that 97% of everything you know about yourself and about your country and your world comes from the male perspective” (Miss Representation). Not that the male perspective is wrong but if the target audience is mostly towards women than women should be the ones to be portraying what and who REAL women are.

While examining female political candidates for presidency or in leadership roles, it came to no shock to me that women in power are seen as a horrible and unattractive idea. When Hilary Clinton speaks people respond with, “Take out the garbage (Miss Representation)!” or when she comes on television men “involuntarily cross their legs (Miss Representation).” She is also confronted with phrases of “Iron my clothes!” and a “stereotypical bitch”. Some journalists believe that she became senator because of Bill Clinton and how he “messed around” (Missrepresentation) not because of her merit. When Sarah Palin became a candidate, she was looked at as more feminine and as a “woman other woman want to be and men want to mate with” (Missrepresentation). Photographers documented supporters between her legs that were at her convention which “pornified and ditzified” (Miss Representation) her image. Both Hilary and Sarah portray themselves differently trying to attract the audience for their ideas and thoughts but in return received cruel banter and their dignity taken away from them. Though these two candidates were disrespected for their ideas and beliefs, they did not give up in their hope in becoming a political leader despite their gender societal standard.

Women such as Jes Baker, Naomi Wolf, Katherine Hardwicke, Hilary Clinton and Sarah Palin are role models for the realization of unhealthy beauty and societal standards. I was able to break the mental barrier because of the examination these women put on our culture and what example they set for young women. I learned about women, about myself and what potentials we hold inside of us. I learned to love myself even though that sounds cliché but I am grateful for who I am, what I’ve done and what I can do. I am empowered and passionate about seeing more

women in leadership or even myself. I never thought that coming out of this research I would want to be a revolutionary but I do. I WANT to be the change that I wish to see in the world but I also want other women too feel the same way. We can empower each other by standing up for each other when we're oppressed or objectified. We can empower each other by surrounding ourselves around inspiring role models and women and men who believe that we can make a difference and that we deserve to be in this world. Because women do deserve to be in this world. We deserve the same rights given to men. We deserve equal pay. We deserve to be known more than a shirt size or what makeup we use. We deserve equality because we are humans, we are complex and we don't take "no" for an answer when we put our minds and hearts into something we are passionate about.

#### Manifesto:

- Know your world and what kind of society you live in. Define what it's like to be a woman in society today.
- Acknowledge your feelings if something is wrong. Don't push it aside because it's not the status quo!
- Be media literate.
- Have faith in yourself in whatever you do.
- Fight for what you believe in and stand up for other girls.
- Surround yourself with people that support you for you and what you believe in. But don't be afraid if someone stands up to your views or challenges your beliefs.
- Love yourself. Love yourself whole. Love yourself in pieces; just love who you are and that the world wouldn't be where it is without your thoughts and actions.

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