FROM FASHION TO FITNESS?
A SOCIOCULTURAL ANALYSIS OF THE REPRESENTATION
OF THINNESS WITHIN THE MASS MEDIA

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
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0-612-29146-4
ABSTRACT

The prevalence of eating disorders among young women has been called an epidemic within Western society (Brumberg, 1988). While there are a complex series of psychological, familial and sociocultural elements at play in this development, the focus of this study was on the role of the mass media in presenting thinness as a socially constructed feminine ideal. The purpose of this thesis was to expand further the cultural definition of thinness by looking at the variations in its presentation within two categories of women's magazines: fashion and fitness. An exploration was undertaken of the process of consumerism and the structural linkage between advertisements and editorial content. This examination was filtered through my own in-depth personal relationship to eating pathology and my negotiation of thinness as an ideal construct.

While thinness appears to be the current ideal image of beauty presented within this print medium, through diverse advertising strategies this image may be presented differently within various types of women's magazines. I argue that thinness is not a uni-dimensional construct and should not be examined as such within the eating disorder literature. It is important to expand research beyond a linear mode of causality between eating pathology and the media's promotion of a thin body image, and to acknowledge women as active participants in the negotiation of media imagery.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis supervisor Dr. Kari Dehli for her support and encouragement as well as her invaluable advice and guidance throughout every stage of this paper. Thank you also to Dr. Helen Lenskyj for being on my committee and whose input and valuable suggestions were greatly appreciated.

Many thanks also to Judith Millen who gave me a great deal of help and motivation at the initial stage of my research.

Lastly special gratitude to my family and Amir for supporting me throughout the completion of this thesis.
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CHAPTER ONE.

1.1 INTRODUCTION.

Eating disorders have become increasingly more widespread within Western society over the past several decades. As the literature has expanded beyond the clinical context within which eating pathology is examined, current research now focuses on a multitude of causal elements in the proliferation of these disorders, particularly among young women. Family dynamics, personality traits and sociocultural elements are among the range of factors at play in this complex process. Within the latter category, the role of the media in promoting ideal standards of body image unrealistic for the majority of women, has been examined extensively within the literature. This thesis is an attempt to delve further into this analysis through an in-depth look at the presentation of thinness as a socially constructed ideal within the mass media. Through an interpretive analysis of two categories of women’s magazines, this thesis will examine the variations in the expression of thinness as an idealized construct.

Before beginning it is first important to conceptualize what is meant by eating disorders for the purpose of this study. There are various degrees of disturbed eating patterns encompassing a range of behaviours from excessive eating to starvation. This study is an examination of the extent to which cultural factors, in promoting an ideal standard of bodily attractiveness, may result in the pursuit and preoccupation with a thin ideal and subsequently form the basis for the development of eating pathology.

An in-depth analysis of the various eating patterns along the continuum of behaviour is not a component of this thesis. Instead, reference will be made primarily to anorexia nervosa and bulimia as subtypes of eating
disorders that may be mediated by the representation of specific body images within the mass media. Yet while this is a general conceptualization for the purpose of this particular study, it does not ignore the complex array of eating patterns that exist and the uniqueness in experience of those who develop them.

1.2 History of Eating Pathology.

While behaviour associated with disordered eating first began hundreds of years ago when, in the fourteenth century, many women engaged in fasting and purging as a way to lose weight, one of the first people to report on what we now refer to as anorexia nervosa was Richard Morton in 1689, who in one of the earliest medical reports, spoke of this disorder as a "Nervous Consumption" (Morton, 1689 as cited in Bruch, 1973:211). However, it was not until 100 years ago that anorexia nervosa first became a clinical entity with the reports of Gull in England and Laseque in France.

Both Laseque and Gull identified the manifestation of several similar symptoms, including emaciation, loss of appetite and amenorrhoea caused by what they both considered to be psychological factors in the development of the disorder. However, they also reported marked differences in their conception of the illness. This promoted a great deal of controversy within the literature surrounding both the definition and etiology of eating disorders. These differences were attributed to the complexity of eating patterns and the possibility that varying forms of the same disorder were likely to be presented within several different patients. The controversy became further complicated in 1914 when a report by Simmons suggested evidence that anorexia nervosa was in fact attributable to an endocrine disturbance rather than a patient’s psychological imbalance (Bruch, 1973:24).
While acknowledgement of the endocrine origin of this eating disorder persisted within the literature, the focus remained on the psychological factors in its development. In particular, attention was placed on two primary variables: the symbolic significance of the oral component of the disorder, and the personality and life style of the patients including disturbances in ego function and interpersonal relations (Bruch, 1973:215). By focusing on the oral or eating significance as the centre of observation, these psychoanalytic theories were based upon Freud’s assumption that, “impairment in the nutritional instinct was related to the organism’s failure to master sexual excitation” (Bruch, 1973:216).

Variations surrounding the conception of anorexia as an expression of an internalized sexual conflict were examined by a number of psychoanalysts during this time and this thinking dominated the clinical literature. Yet with this intense focus on only one aspect of the disorder, several alternate factors in the development and maintenance of eating pathology were neglected. As psychoanalytic thinking evolved, theorists gradually began to focus on early development and behaviour related not solely to food, but to interpersonal relations and external experiences. With this move away from a one-sided emphasis of anorexia to a more dynamic conception, more attention within the literature was placed on differentiating various subgroups within the disorder (Bruch, 1973).

Today the terms anorexia nervosa and bulimia have become common place within Western societies and, whether studied together or as separate entities, the research surrounding these complex disorders has become more extensive. While both the medical and the psychiatric fields are continually contributing to the fast growing body of literature through a focus on the etiology, as well as the treatment and course of eating disorders, attention has
also centered on the social context within which these disturbed patterns of
eating have developed.

Central in this discussion is the changing roles of women within
modern society and the conflicting demands and pressures that have become
reflective of this change. As the contradictions between motherhood and
career become more apparent and the traditional conception of 'femininity'
undergoes a transformation, women must negotiate an identity in the face of
these demands. “Today, in fact women are expected to be beautiful, smart and
well groomed, and to devote a great deal of time to their personal appearance
even while competing in business and the professions” (Selvini-

Yet one of the most interesting issues that must be attended to in
examining this assertion within the research is that it expresses a class bias.
While the contradictions between paid employment and motherhood may
serve as an influential force in contributing to the development of certain
disturbed eating patterns among some women, such conflict may not impact
all women in the same way. Women of all class backgrounds and many
groups of minority women take part in various forms of wage labour.
Different types of work create various levels and types of pressure. While
middle and upper class women, in dealing with the strains of career and
motherhood, often develop eating disorders as a coping mechanism,
disturbed patterns of eating may be a response to quite different pressures in
other groups of females.

The notion that an institutional imperative toward thinness is a backlash against
women’s economic gains does speak to the advances of white middle- and upper-
class women. But, as these women have been struggling to move up the
occupational ladder, working-class women of all races have been striving simply to
stay on the ladder - a ladder that, for them, has been horizontally rather than
vertically positioned. (Thompson, 1994:7)
Addressing all women within a similar framework and assuming that they are impacted similarly by various elements in the development of eating pathology may undermine the crucial difference in life experiences of certain groups.

The mass media within Western culture and the representation of the thin ideal of body attractiveness in almost every aspect of popular culture from television to magazine advertising, has also proven to be especially influential in understanding the sociocultural factors in the development of eating pathology. One of the primary goals of the media’s cultural gatekeepers is the production and consumption of goods and services. "Through the ideological promotion of selected issues, the media inform girls and women what their major preoccupations should be. In particular, this 'culture of femininity' (Women's Study Group, 1978) focuses on representations of an ideal female body" (Dolan & Gitzinger, 1994:45).

Women are constantly bombarded with images and messages that thin is beautiful, feminine and desirable. As these images strive to convince us that happiness is dependent upon losing those extra pounds, shaping, toning and reconstructing that less than perfect body into something perfect and flawless, the message is loud and clear: beauty is not skin deep, nor does it come in all shapes and sizes. It comes in one package: a thin one.

1.3 Population at Risk.

Within the past twenty years the prevalence of eating disorders within North American society has increased considerably (Nagel & Jones, 1992; Schwartz, Thompson, & Johnson, 1982). In the United States, the National Chapters of Anorexia Nervosa and Related Eating Disorders Inc (ANRED), and Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders (ANAD) have speculated
that 20% of the total female population between age 12 and 30 are experiencing a severe eating disorder (Nagel & Jones, 1992). In Canada this number is similarly high, as indicated by reports of the National Eating Disorder Information Centre which found that more than 300,000 Canadian women and girls are impacted by this problem. This reflects at least 7 per cent of the total female population with the mortality rate estimated at around 15 percent (Poulton, 1996:36).

While these numbers may at first glance appear exceptionally high, they may not be all that surprising. Western culture appears to have become consumed with issues surrounding weight loss, dieting and the attainment of a body image which fits the cultural ideal that society has deemed acceptable and desirable. The body and how it looks have become a significant component of our self worth (Rodin, 1992:58). Yet for women and young girls, the consequences of this obsession may be devastating. In a Canadian magazine survey, 33,000 female respondents stated that they would rather be thinner than achieve any other goal in life. In a recent survey it was reported that 11 percent of the respondents would opt for abortion if a genetic predisposition to obesity were detected in their unborn child. Lastly it has been found that women who were once fat would rather deliberately choose to be deaf, blind or have a limb amputated than to regain the weight (Poulton, 1996:17).

Yet the reality of these alarming statistics seems all too clear in the literature surrounding the rates of eating pathology among women. Pyle, Halvorson, Neuman and Mitchell (1986), in a study of college students found that the percentage of females who engaged in bingeing and purging behaviour at least once a week increased from 1% in 1980 to 3.2% in 1983. Similarly, in their analysis of three university populations Pope, Hudson,
Yurgelun-Todd and Hudson (1984) reported that among the female sample, 1.0% to 2.1% displayed a history of anorexia nervosa (with or without a history of bulimia), and 6.5% to 18.6% displayed a history of bulimia (without a history of anorexia nervosa). In total, the study revealed that of the 544 female respondents, 84 (15.4%) met DSM-III criteria for a major eating disorder. Outside the student population it has been reported that bulimia and anorexia affect up to 1 in 50 women in North America and Europe, while in England studies have shown that up to 2% of women are found to have bulimia nervosa and approximately 1 in 500 girls and young women suffer with anorexia nervosa (Dolan & Gitzinger, 1994).

There appears to be a number of common threads among the population dealing with eating pathology. Numerous studies have shown the over representation of women within this group (Faust, 1987, Garner & Garfinkel, 1980; Gremillion, 1992; Mahowald, 1992; Garner, Garfinkel, Schwartz & Thompson, 1980; Silverstein & Perdue, 1986; Mazur, 1986; Nagel, 1992; Packer, 1995; Root, 1990; Van Strein, 1989; Rost & Florin, 1982; Cantrell & Ellis, 1984). In an analysis of three student populations Pope et al. (1984) found no male students who displayed a pattern of disordered eating.

Several studies have also pointed to eating disorders as primarily a middle and upper class phenomenon. In the United Kingdom, a study by Crisp, Palmer and Kalucy (1976) found that the occurrence of an eating disorder was four times more likely among private school girls than public school. Similar patterns of eating pathology and excessive dieting concerns have also been found with increasing rates of frequency among college and university students (Pope et al., 1984; Pyle et al., 1986). In fostering a high level of competition, both academic and personal, these environments often serve as breeding grounds in promoting insecurity and poor self esteem (Striegel-
Moore, Silberstein & Rodin, 1986).

In examining the subculture within which the development of such behaviour may be fostered, it has also been shown that for those whose profession demands a controlled standard of weight and shape such as dancers, models or athletes, the numbers are extremely high (Striegel-Moore et al., 1986). Women within these professions have been found to weigh at least twenty percent less than the average woman. Moreover "the average model, dancer, or actress is thinner than 95 percent of the female population" (Wolf, 1991:185).

Garner and Garfinkel (1980), in their research on modelling and dance students, found that anorexia nervosa was significantly more common in these students than in other women of both similar age and social class. Moreover while it was suggested that the women at the highest risk for developing anorexia may have been preferentially selected for these groups, it was shown that those students at the highest risk in fact developed this behaviour while actively participating in the activities (Garner & Garfinkel, 1980). This research suggests that given the pressure to succeed within both the modelling and dance industries, it may be important to examine the extent to which heightened performance demands play a role in the development of excessive dieting and weight preoccupation within these settings.

While both anorexia and bulimia have been found to occur frequently among women within a higher socioeconomic strata, they are also considered a predominantly white phenomenon (Gremillion, 1992; Parker, 1995; Root, 1990). Yet more recently, the research has begun to question this generalization. The next section will explore this issue in depth.
1.4 Race, Ethnicity and Eating Disorders.

Without question, a great deal of the literature points to the prevalence of eating disorders as a predominantly white, female, middle and upper class phenomenon. However, it has been suggested that the exclusion of a particular subset of the population may fail to accurately reflect the reality that exists surrounding those at risk in developing eating pathology (Root, 1990). In her discussion around disordered eating in women of colour, Root asserts that much of the research within this realm appears to have been undertaken in a way which addresses race as an afterthought rather than a significant variable within the examination. The setting or social context within which individuals are examined (such as universities or private clinics) often makes it unlikely that ethnic minorities may be selected for inclusion within the study. “Basing theory on studies restricted to these locations has limited knowledge of women who are not in college, of women of colour, of older women and poor women” (Thompson, 1994:12). Failure to include certain groups within the research serves to strengthen the stereotypical assumptions surrounding who gets eating disorders and who does not, further reinforcing this ‘illness’ as the “Golden Girls Disease” (Root, 1990).

While the exclusion of ethnic minorities within much of the literature has been attributed to the assumption that people of colour are protected against developing eating disorders by their cultural contexts, it has also been suggested that within Western society where individuals are faced with a multicultural context, such protection is seldom available (Root, 1990). People of colour may in fact be vulnerable to many of the same, as well as additional variables that have been found to be influential in the development of eating disorders among white women. “Emphasis on
thinness is certainly not universal or equally tenacious across race and ethnicity” and as such, eating disorders must be understood within the context of additional factors (Thompson, 1994:9). Given this, considerably more attention has recently been placed on the increasing prevalence of disturbed eating patterns among ethnic minorities (Root, 1990; Silber, 1986; Hsu, 1987).

In his case studies of seven Hispanic and Black women diagnosed with anorexia nervosa, Silber (1986) suggested that the manifestations of the illness among the women was no different from the symptoms appearing within white women. The women, who represented 5% of the total number of patients with anorexia nervosa seen over a twelve year period, displayed varying degrees of symptoms including hypertension, emaciation, malnutrition and depression.

An important finding in this study indicated that all of the women were from professional upper middle class backgrounds and as a result of their economic position had adequate access to health care and treatment facilities. Yet while the symptoms of anorexia nervosa had been present for an average of one year, only 50% of the patients had been diagnosed with the illness upon the first visit to the Medical Centre outpatient department. Silber (1986) suggests that the delay in establishing a diagnosis was more a result of stereotypical thinking among health care professionals surrounding those considered at risk in developing an eating disorder, rather than an absence of key elements in the presentation of the illness. All of the patients displayed many of the same psychological, family and societal patterns of behaviour found to be particularly relevant in the development of anorexia among white women, yet the cultural conventions dismissing ethnic minorities as likely candidates for this illness, appeared to reject the most
obvious diagnosis.

Similarly, Hsu (1987) in his study of two hospitals, reported that while no black eating disorder patient was ever referred to either facility prior to 1981, following that period, seven referrals were made within a 42 month span. This figure represented 4% of all eating disorder referrals to both hospitals. Moreover, through a case study analysis it was discovered that several of the women displayed many of the same characteristics found to play an influential role in the development of eating pathology among white women. Five of the women showed a family history of alcoholism and/or depression which, as examined in several studies, has been shown to play an integral role in predisposing individuals to develop disturbed patterns of eating behaviour.

Ultimately it may appear that while there exists a complex interplay of factors in predisposing certain individuals towards eating pathology, it is important to examine this complexity through a lens which includes diversity of race and ethnicity and to allow discussion beyond the white, middle-class, female stereotype that encompasses eating disorders within our society (Root, 1990).

1.5 Social Construction of Femininity

Within Western culture, from the moment a baby is born and the doctor screams, 'it's a boy' or 'it's a girl', the rules of gender differentiation begin. Pink for girls and blue for boys, trucks for boys and dolls for girls. Girls are expected to be passive, quiet and shy while boys loud and rambunctious. These seemingly simple codes and ways of being that so often become instilled in us from the moment we enter the world become rules and regulations, expectations or lessons in the art of being 'masculine' or
'feminine'. As we grow older these cultural constructions become increasingly more rigid. Young girls and adolescents are expected to excel at different tasks: girls are directed towards more creative, hands on abilities while boys are encouraged to take on challenging, rationally based endeavours. Employment opportunities and careers become streamlined into traditionally male versus female occupations. Yet the rules that distinguish these traditional roles that society has dictated may not be equally balanced.

When the 'cultural ideal' is rigidly imposed on male and female adolescents it thus affects them not only differently but unequally.... Nonetheless, parents are often more tolerant of independence for their sons; they expect their daughters to be more concerned about their appearance, and most still expect their sons to be the initiators of opposite-sex interaction. (Mahowald, 1992:243)

There may be some disagreement surrounding the definition or formulation of gender based behaviour. One author has defined it as, "... the degree to which his or her [the child's] behaviour and attitudes coincide with cultural stereotypes of masculinity and femininity" (Heilbrun,1968 as cited in Mahowald,1992:240). There does appear to be some general agreement surrounding the elements contained within the traditional construction of gender roles. "Typical of the behaviour subsumed under the adult masculine sex-role are achievement, autonomy, dominance, and endurance; feminine adult sex-role behaviour would include deference, abasement, succorance, nurturance, and affiliation" (Heilbrun,1968 as cited in Mahowald,1992:240).

In looking at the construction of femininity in particular, it appears that the art of becoming and being feminine is complex and contradictory. It is not uniform for all women and there may be class or cultural differences within this traditional notion. In her insightful book Femininity, Susan Brownmiller asserts that "femininity, in essence, is a romantic sentiment, a nostalgic tradition of imposed limitations" (p.14). Femininity, she asserts, always demands more.
To be insufficiently feminine is viewed as a failure in core sexual identity, or as a failure to care sufficiently about oneself, for a woman found wanting will be appraised (and will appraise herself) as mannish or neutered or simply unattractive, as men have defined these terms. (Brownmiller, 1984:15)

She examines the expression of white femininity through various characteristics such as the body, hair, clothing and voice, and explores the ways in which the established traditions associated with femininity, such as hair style or codes of behaviour may serve as the “...social determinants of gender” (Brownmiller, 1984:236). While she looks at these issues in detail, Brownmiller’s aim is not to set forth a new definition of femininity. Rather she attempts to examine and explore in detail both the origins of, as well as the reasons for, the perseverance of, “a compelling esthetic that has evolved over thousands of years” (Brownmiller, 1984:235).

While femininity in the traditional sense encompasses an expression of elements of clothing, body and dress, it is important to explore how this construct connotes an imperative towards heterosexuality. Whether implicitly or explicitly, girls across class, ethnicity, race and religion learn that being heterosexual is natural and inevitable (Thompson, 1994). These expectations add up to what Adrienne Rich terms ‘compulsory heterosexuality’: “a largely invisible but enormously powerful force that orchestrates the range of what is considered acceptable female sexuality” (Rich, 1986 as cited in Thompson, 1994:38). This “enforced heterosexuality” is a complex notion. It supports expectations around marriage and childrearing in relation to traditional masculine and feminine gender roles and reinforces both physical and sexual male control over women. Rather then being freely chosen, is institutionally supported and endorsed and, in failing to allow for the range and diversity of human relationships, it enforces heterosexual relations as a necessary condition of normal development (Rich, 1986 as cited
in Thompson, 1994). However, based on this discussion as well as my own personal experience, it appears that for women this heterosexual appeal and sexual attractiveness towards men is expressed through “appropriately” feminine and ladylike ways of being. In exploring what she terms the process of “grooming girls to be heterosexual” Thompson (1994), in her analysis of several minority women with disturbed eating patterns points out that, “implicit messages were commonly conveyed in the form of how girls were expected to look, how they were permitted to use their bodies athletically, how they should dress, and how much they were allowed to eat” (p.38). Yet while girls were given lessons on being feminine, males within the same families were seldom subject to restrictions that promoted acceptable masculine behaviour. The rational for this double standard was that girls were expected to be smaller in order to be attractive to the opposite sex and, as in my own experience, a smaller, thinner body image and good looks was translated into the expression of feminine appeal. As Thompson suggests,

This taken-for-granted aspect of their socialization meant that all the models for sexuality pivoted on attracting men; there were no alternatives. Consequently, there was no room for the idea that women’s appetites and body sizes could be defined according to their own standards rather than norms based on rigid definitions of masculinity and femininity. (Thompson, 1994:40)

The lesson for women was that the expression of femininity through appearance, beauty and in this case thinness, were requirements leading to the fulfillment of expectations of “successful heterosexuality” including among other things, dating, marriage and childrearing.

When I speak of femininity in my analysis of various media images within two very distinct types of women’s magazines, I am referring to a socially constructed notion of femininity that I myself have become instilled with through the course of my own life. I too, like so many women, experienced times growing up where my ‘unfeminine’ or inappropriate
'tomboyish' behaviour led to such comments as, 'be more ladylike' and 'cross your legs properly like a lady.' And while my parents never obsessed over my lack of interest at several stages of my childhood, in the 'appropriate' toys or clothing, "... lessons in the art of being feminine lay all around me and I absorbed them all" (Brownmiller, 1984). I wore the pink dresses and did well in school just as I was expected to. I kept my hair long for fear that I would more closely resemble a boy than the cute adorable little girl that I was supposed to be. Unlike my brother, I seldom got into trouble and when I did, everyone was surprised. Growing up, my conception of femininity was formed through these socialization experiences and these ideas and notions around being feminine became internalized as I matured and moved through adolescence and into adulthood.

The various paths I have taken may have defied some of the traditional notions of femininity that I myself have become ingrained with. Yet I feel that my conception of thinness at the initial stages of my eating pathology and throughout my progression, were in many ways based upon these socially constructed notions. I negotiated the images of high fashion waif thin models in terms of a perception of feminine that to me, represented something very different from the thin body image presented and attainable through fitness and exercise. My interpretation of this concept throughout this analysis of media imagery is therefore not intended to present a generalizable construction or definition of femininity, nor is it intended to encompass the range of elements contained within this construct.

While central to my internalization of images of thinness within both fashion and fitness magazines was and continues to be, the significance of these images as a reflection of my desired version of femininity, this notion is not perceived similarly by all women. The art of being feminine is defined by,
and encompasses several socially produced elements which among other things include ways of looking or behaving. It is not a conception that all women internalize in the same way, if at all and, it is not a central defining force in the lives of many females. Rather, for some, the inherent repressive nature of the cultural construction of femininity forms the basis for defiance against this notion and all that it represents within modern Western society. Given the wide and extremely diverse audience of the magazines selected for this examination, it seems evident that large numbers of females have access to, and consume the images in these publications. However, many are not impacted in the same way, if at all, by the ideal notions of thinness that I have found to be pervasive within this material. The nature and extent of my relationship to this imagery is based upon my own cultivation of femininity as a measure against which my identity has been shaped and formed. My understanding and impressions around being feminine did not occur in a vacuum, rather they were based upon commonly held assumptions and society's endorsement of this construct in the traditional sense. The traditional sense being that of a white heterosexual construction of femininity where, my appropriately feminine behaviour which translated into among other things, eating less, occupying less space, dressing and acting ladylike, was intimately connected to my physical appeal and attractiveness to the opposite sex. Among other things, this thesis will show that while my own negotiation of magazine imagery is only one unique angle or lens through which these images may be viewed, it played an influential and powerful force in my struggle with eating pathology.

1.6 Personal Experience

My starting point for this study comes from my own interpretative
analysis surrounding the media’s construction of an idealized body image and
the obsessive preoccupation with thinness. My initial struggle with weight
and dieting began at the age of sixteen, during which time I experienced
considerable disruption and unsettlement after immigrating to Canada from
my country of birth. While I was never overweight as a child, I was always
considered a little ‘chubby’. Throughout school I was a hard working, ‘A’
student. I was teased more often for being ‘brainy’ than for being plump.

At the age of sixteen I began a new high school in a new country where
I knew no one. Shortly thereafter my problems around dieting began. My peer
group displayed a great deal of concern over appearance and looks and as we
flipped through fashion magazines and obsessed over models, whose body
image was far removed from the reality of our own appearance, I came to
value these images as icons of beauty and perfection.

Up until this point my appearance and weight and diet had never been
issues of concern. Yet at this crucial stage of development, in negotiating my
identity, I became exposed to the world of fashion and a subculture in which
looks and appearance became fundamental components of self worth.
Preoccupied with these ideals of beauty, my dieting did not begin as an
attempt to lose a few pounds. I set out to become thin. Striving to attain an
unrealistic standard of beauty, my appearance and the representation of
thinness that I attained, became symbols of something greater. My body image
became a tool through which I gained popularity. I exerted control over the
one ‘thing’ that I was able to control: my weight.

While I was never the largest in my class throughout school, I was
always one of the tallest. In high school, thinness and smallness was a
standard measure of desirability. Just like the smaller, more petite girls at
school, the thin willowy images of women in fashion magazines such as
Vogue and Cosmopolitan represented femininity for me. In striving to embody what I perceived to be feminine appeal, I also became conscious of appropriate behaviour and ways to act.

My perception that women were supposed to eat less, was also translated into the belief that to be feminine one had to occupy less space, take on an invisible presence, and present oneself passively. The media’s promotion of ideal images of beauty appeared to reinforce this assertion. Through my eyes, the idealized images of physical perfection within the pages of fashion magazines personified women as coy, shy, and passive, while at the same time rejecting the physical traits of womanhood. Many of the models did not have accentuated breasts or hips. Rather their curveless female form resembled that of a young boy. At a time when my own body was developing and maturing, I worked to undermine and de-emphasize the elements of myself that failed to represent the thin, breastless, shapeless female images that embodied my desired notion of femininity.

While my restricted eating and exercise regime involved an intense level of self control to attain this cultural ideal, I presented the end result, namely my thinness, to the outside world as something that I accomplished with ease. My identity was negotiated through the presentation of thinness as an innate quality, a natural component of myself attained with little effort. Thinness became a symbol of something greater. It became the basis upon which my self worth was established and a way for me to gain a sense of control and competency.

My initial struggle with eating began almost ten years ago. Since then I have scaled the range along the continuum of eating disorders from one extreme to the other. While my obsession with thinness has remained constant, the symbolic significance of this constructed ideal body type has not.
Rather, my pursuit of thinness has shaped changing visions of femininity that I have internalized. Through excessive exercise, fitness and restricted food intake, the ideal image that I strive to attain is still a thin one, yet it has become cloaked in a different veil and represents a notion of femininity based on what I now perceive to be power and control. Through a focus on the body, exercise has become a means to not only lose weight, but to gain definition and form while remaining thin. My perception of thinness no longer symbolizes femininity as a passive construct, but manipulation and control of the body through these techniques has allowed me to conceptualize the thin body ideal as an active agent of control.

While my status as a white, middle class female initially placed me within the category identified most at risk within the eating disorder literature, there is a complex interplay of psychological, familiar and sociocultural characteristics which contribute to this development and which undoubtedly played a central role in my eating disorder. The role of the media in presenting an idealized standard of beauty is just one element within this complex dynamic and one variable that I feel guided my relationship to eating pathology.

Exploring the negotiation of these standards of beauty through the progressive stages of my personal experience, has allowed me to identify conceptions of body image that have formed the basis upon which the print medium of fashion magazines within this particular study will be examined. Filtering these image interpretations around my own in-depth experience and relationship to eating pathology will serve as an invaluable tool in contributing further to this analysis. In particular, this exploration will delve further into the role of advertising and consumerism in promoting distinct and differing conceptions of thinness and examine their distribution and
frequency within both fashion and fitness magazines.

1.7 Purpose of study

"Fashion magazines are a potent means of socializing young consumers about beauty and fashion and for advertising beauty - and fashion-related products" (Englis, Solomon & Ashmore, 1994:53). In looking at a selection of women's fashion and fitness magazines, the purpose of this study is to examine major common sense popular culture images of thinness presented within this media format in an attempt to consider the ways in which thinness as a cultural ideal may be presented as a multidimensional construct. One of the primary ways in which idealized images of beauty are promoted within this medium of popular culture is through the process of advertising. In examining this dynamic I will analyze advertisements and editorial content and the structural linkage between the two, within a selection of fitness and fashion publications aimed specifically at the female audience.

Through an interpretive analysis of these images and through my own negotiated internalization of these representations in relation to my personal eating pathology, this thesis will suggest that there is more than one form of idealized thinness. Both the childlike waif representations within high fashion and the less passive images within fitness magazines promote diverse standards of beauty that may play very different roles in the dissatisfaction with body image and appearance. In exploring these distinct presentations of the thin body and acknowledging female readers as active in the negotiation of the images set before them, this thesis will also draw attention to the extent to which these images may be internalized differently in the construction of an idealized standard of attractiveness. While there
exists considerable material within the eating disorder literature addressing the sociocultural factors, particularly the media, as important elements in contributing to the proliferation of this problem, the results of this analysis may suggest that this relationship is a complex one and should be examined as such.

The complexity of eating disorders and the factors that play a role in their maintenance and development, is quite evident in the literature surrounding this illness. While the research points to several different variables, including psychological/personality traits, family dynamics and sociocultural influences in contributing to the onset of disordered eating patterns, most acknowledge the need for a multidimensional approach; an interplay of several factors in maintaining and cultivating these patterns. The next section will explore these variables in detail beginning with the influential role of family dynamics.
CHAPTER TWO.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Family Relations - I

The role of the family in the maintenance and development of eating disorders has been documented by several researchers. In looking at anorexia as a "genetic variant of affective disorders", Rivinus et al. (1984) conducted a study in an attempt to determine the relationship between this disturbed eating and affective illness among family members. He collected extensive family information of the psychiatric histories of first degree relatives including grandparents, siblings, aunts and uncles and found substantial linkage between depression and substance abuse in relation to eating pathology. In a similar study a strong correlation between the development of eating disorders and affective disorders within immediate family members suggested that the familial and clinical features shared between the two reflected a genetic connection (Gershon et al, 1984). A genetic marker found to exist in major affective disorders, would also be likely to occur in both anorexic subjects and in the relatives of these individuals.

Other studies have pointed to interactional patterns within the family structure in contributing to the proliferation of pathological eating patterns (Grigg & Frieson, 1989; Humphrey, 1989; Shuger & Krueger, 1995). In exploring familial transactional patterns related to anorexia nervosa, Grigg & Frieson (1989) examined interpersonal relationships between the women who developed eating disorders and their parents. The researchers indicated that a variety of family relationship patterns play important supportive roles to environments that predispose children to anorexia nervosa and also serve to
maintain the symptoms of this disorder.

While these findings point to a multidimensional perspective in examining various disordered eating patterns, Humphrey (1989) discovered more specific patterns of family relations. Humphrey reported that while parents of anorexics were extremely comforting and nurturing towards their daughters, they were also neglectful and ignoring. The contradictory messages present in the communication patterns within the families of anorexic patients, created a setting in which the women themselves became ambivalent in their responses to their parents. This was shown through negative facial expressions, body posture and tone of voice (Humphrey, 1989). Family communication levels were also found to be particularly significant in their improvement during therapy. Thus, families who displayed a high level of hidden or covert aggression and a low level of overt confrontation, significantly influenced the rate at which the anorexic woman improved during various stages of treatment.

In addition to the interactional patterns of family relations, the research has also looked at the individual characteristics of family members. It has been suggested that while the families of women with eating disorders on the outside may appear to be based on normal, healthy relations, they are often quite dysfunctional (Bruch, 1973). Parents, often intent on maintaining the appearance of happiness at all costs, deny the existence of problems to continue the appearance of a cohesive unit within the family structure. Other characteristics of parents of those who develop eating disorders include overachieving mothers frustrated in their own career aspirations, as well as fathers who are preoccupied with outward appearance and physical beauty (Bruch, 1973:82).

The families of anorexic women have often been found to be unsettled
and unstable especially due to overly controlling parents who, in an attempt to gain control over the actions and behaviour of their children, exert excessive restrictions within the household. It has also been shown that the dissatisfaction of the mother within a marriage which may have suffocated her move towards independence outside the home, may result in her failure to transmit a sense of competence to her own daughter (Bruch, 1973). Subsequently the daughter finds herself lacking in her sense of self confidence and value as an individual. In the face of excessive demands, cloaked by her conformity, the anorexic suffers anxiety and is unable to live up to her parents expectations. In this literature, eating pathology is seen as a delayed attempt at independence - a way to impose personal control over the body (Bruch, 1973).

The psychoanalytic research surrounding eating disorders has been filled with the notion that relates women's experience with their mothers as a predisposing element in the onset of this problem. While Bruch recognizes the importance of interpersonal relations and the environment in relation to biological development, she also examines the importance of the early mother infant relationship. She explores the underdeveloped mother infant relationship in which the child's needs are not recognized by the mother in the early stages of development. As a result of the mother responding only to the child at her convenience, the child, unable to perceive her own internal demands, learns to be receptive to others and please only those around her (Robertson, 1992:35; Bruch, 1973:80). In an attempt to gain control and establish an independent sense of self and identity, the anorexic woman maintains control through starvation of her bodily needs. The thinness she attains represents her success in achieving this control.

Chodorow (1978) also sees the mother infant relationship as crucial in
this development asserting that as a result of the difficulty experienced by females in separating from their mothers and breaking the infantile bond, women in adulthood are less able to develop a distinct sense of identity. This inability to achieve a self definition based on her own experiences may subsequently place a woman more at risk in the development of eating pathology.

Similarly, Chernin (1985) who also finds the origins of eating pathology in the inability of the female to develop past her mother, suggests that the mother daughter bond during infancy is the site of intense infantile fantasies and the desire by the infant to inflict oral attacks on the mother. This primal association between the mother and food pushes the female to struggle to separate from her which she does with extreme guilt and pain. The female is unable to control her anger towards the mother and instead inflicts pain on herself resulting in the development of disturbed eating patterns.

Orbach (1986) links the pathological mother infant bond during infancy to the emergence of eating pathology in adulthood and asserts that in failing to meet the dependency needs of the child, the mother scars the normal course of separation. Food for the child becomes not only an object of desire but of fear: fear relating to not being cared for. In learning that she is not able to have her emotional needs met, the child learns from the mother that she must serve the needs of others.

Drawing on Object Relations Theory, Orbach (1986) extends Winnicott’s idea of the “false self” and in so doing proposes that the anorexic woman, in an attempt to please those around her, attempts to fulfil a standard of the feminine ideal that society has impressed upon women. In so doing she develops a ‘false body’ to compensate for her own real but unacceptable body image. This false body then becomes the site of manipulation and control and
the site where she can abuse herself through disordered eating patterns.

Boskind Lodahl (1976) extends the discussion further by suggesting that while the mother infant relationship may play a pivotal role in this dynamic, this fragmented identity may be a result of other cultural, social and psychological pressures. She asserts that women with eating disorders devote themselves to fulfilling the feminine role rather than developing their own personal sense of self. With an over concern in pleasing others and reliance on those around them for self worth, these women accept the traditional notion of wifehood, motherhood and intimacy as the fundamental components of femininity. The pursuit of thinness is not only an acceptance of this traditional notion but an exaggerated striving to achieve it (Boskind Lodahl, 1976).

There are a number of issues of concern surrounding this psychologistic body of literature. Firstly, the psychoanalytic research places an excessive burden on the mother in contributing to the development of eating pathology. Assuming that the mother is the primary caregiver fails to take into consideration the role, if any, played by an alternative caregiver, male or female. By focusing on one individual, this mother-blaming material does not look at the entire family and the context within which identities are negotiated and relationships are formed. Within family dynamics across many diverse cultures, there may be a number of individuals such as extended family members and siblings, who assume an active role in this relationship. I feel that the participation of such individuals in the childrearing process is an important area of inquiry within the research. Other studies have shown that many women with eating disorders, in devoting themselves to fulfilling the traditional feminine role, fail to develop their sense of self worth. Yet as Thompson (1994) suggests, many
women do not accept these traditionally passive and compliant notions of femininity and wifehood. In particular, adherence to these traditional ideals may not accurately describe socialization patterns among those within certain racial or ethnic groups such as African American women. Alternatively this may also be true for lesbian, single, widowed or divorced women who do not rely on male support and who actively participate full time in the economic market. It is therefore important to take into consideration, among other things, the context within which eating disorders develop and to acknowledge both the similarities and differences in experience among women from a diversity of backgrounds.

2.2 Individual and Personality Traits

The clinical research also points to the influential role of individual and/or psychological characteristics in the expression and course of disordered eating patterns among women. As a result of high expectations from parents, females who later become high risk for the development of eating disorders are often seen as well behaved, high achievers who gain a great deal of popularity at a young age (Bruch,1973). While they are often exposed to and excel at various activities both social and recreational, they are seldom encouraged by parents to develop self expression or independent decision making (Bruch,1973). Other predisposing characteristics found to play an influential role in the expression and course of disordered eating patterns include perfectionism and obsessive behaviour (Mahowald,1992; Peterson,1987; Bruch,1973).

In looking at the existence of psychological characteristics Smith, Feldman, Nasserbakht and Steiner (1993), in a six year follow up study in adulthood, examined the presence of psychiatric disorders in women with
anorexia nervosa. In addition to revealing that 60% of individuals with eating pathology also met the criteria for affective and/or anxiety disorder at follow up, the study outlined several psychological characteristics as predictive elements in the future outcome of the women. The research also revealed stark differences in the use of coping mechanisms by women who displayed psychological problems after the follow up, including an increased reliance on cognitive avoidance and emotional discharge, and a decreased use of positive reappraisal techniques.

Other research has examined the relationship of the drive for thinness with other personal and interpersonal characteristics among a sample of female adolescents (Faust, 1987). The results identified three significant variables associated with the pursuit of thinness: body dissatisfaction, interceptive awareness, and depression, all variables which have similarly been identified as important among women who develop anorexia nervosa.

In the research that attributes the onset of eating pathology to a personal conflict within the woman herself, there may also be a number of issues of concern. This focus appears to draw attention away from the circumstances or context within which these disorders develop. By blaming the victim and presenting eating problems as an individual disorder rather than for example, a coping mechanism or response to a larger issue, Thompson (1994) suggests that the results of social injustices become mislabeled as individual pathologies (p.6). Overlooking larger societal influences as well as family dynamics as causal elements in the development of disturbed eating patterns, these problems become attributed to personal failure and ineffectiveness. There are a number of factors at play in the complex process through which eating disorders develop and this individual focus fails to consider this multidimensional approach.
2.3 Family Relations - II

The prevalence of common characteristics identified within women who develop disturbed eating patterns may also be related to and a manifestation of, a larger issue. In particular, the high incidence of sexual conflict and abuse displayed in many women who later develop eating disorders has become the focus of increasing attention within the literature. Thompson, in her in-depth study of a group of culturally and ethnically diverse women with eating disorders, found that two thirds of the women were survivors of sexual abuse (Thompson, 1994). Examining the impact of sexual abuse on eating pathology, Thompson suggested that "sexual victimization can cause body-image disturbances, mistrust of one's experiences, confusion about bodily sensations, negative self-esteem and difficulties in identifying or knowing one's feelings.... Dieting can help a woman regain control of her body, which is lost during sexual abuse" (1994:47).

In a similar in-depth study of several women in a hospital inpatient eating disorders unit, Sloan and Leichner (1986) found a striking association between sexual trauma and the onset of eating disorders among the women studied. Other research has identified the impact of specific categories of sexual abuse in these women (Dolan & Gitzinger, 1994). Dolan & Gitzinger (1994) found that the propensity to report unwanted sexual experiences, particularly those with a close male relative, was found to be notably higher among women with eating disorders than those without.

This finding was further reinforced in a study by Oppenheimer, Howells, Palmer and Chaloner (1985). Through an in-depth investigation of sexual trauma among women with both anorexia and bulimia, the
researchers found that nearly two thirds of the women interviewed reported adverse sexual experiences (Oppenheimer et al, 1985). Moreover, while they reported that over eighty percent of the abuse had occurred in childhood, the results supported earlier reports pointing to the involvement of close male relatives. One of the most important findings of the study was the identification of important links of meaning made by the women between the abusive trauma and the subsequent eating pathology (Oppenheimer et al, 1985:359).

In a study of the relationship between sexual and physical abuse, specifically among women with bulimia, Root and Fallon (1988) investigated a sample of over one hundred and seventy women in an outpatient treatment program. The results of the study found that sixty six percent of the women had suffered at least one occurrence of physical abuse, leading the researchers to suggest that while it may be impossible to attribute a causal link between bulimia and the incidence of sexual abuse, its occurrence may contribute to women’s vulnerability in developing this disorder.

Each of these studies point to a common link or chain of events in which it may be suggested that, “the experience of abuse or other unwanted sexual experience leads to dissatisfaction with one’s self and body, leading in turn to a desire to alter the body in some way and hence to dieting and subsequently to eating disorder” (Dolan & Gitzinger, 1994:102). While a linear model of causality may be difficult to determine, the research suggests that while “sexual abuse is neither necessary nor sufficient in the development of eating disorders, it should be viewed as one of the many psychological, biological and social factors operating in the genesis of these complex and multidetermined illnesses” (Sloan & Leichner, 1986:659).

In the literature I have reviewed surrounding the nature of family
relations among those with eating disorders, there were a number of issues which may be further expanded in gaining a more comprehensive look at this area of study. For example, in the research that explored affective and psychiatric disorders among the relatives of those with disturbed eating patterns, one of the most important aspects that I feel needs to be taken issue with, is the method used in attaining the data. Through the use of the family data method, family histories were collected indirectly from parents and relatives rather than from the actual clients. This raises important questions given the possibilities it presents for an underestimation of psychiatric disorders due to the stigma associated with these types of illnesses. Through this method it is likely that family members may be either unwilling to report, or in denial about the existence of psychiatric illness among relatives.

In terms of methodological limitations of much of the literature reviewed here, a number of issues deserve attention. In addition to the small samples used for the research, the majority of the studies were based upon a female population. Another important observation was the failure to draw a distinction between various types of eating pathology. In one study, the research failed to take into consideration the variations along the continuum of disturbed eating, such that bulimic anorexics and restricter anorexics were examined together (Rivinus, 1984). Yet it may be detrimental to ignore the distinct difference between the two disorders. There may be a number of different elements that impact upon the range of eating behaviour patterns and it is important to distinguish this within the literature.

Lastly, this line of inquiry may benefit greatly from a more comparative analysis among family patterns. Comparing family dynamics within distinct types of populations, from those with eating disorders, to those without, to those with other types of clinical problems, may contribute greatly in
examining the types of family patterns unique to individuals with eating pathology. This exploration would allow the researcher to look at why certain patterns are more common than others. The research would also be enhanced if, in looking at the family interactional patterns, observations were made to examine the interplay of these patterns with other "dysfunctional family processes or symptomatic behaviours" (Grigg & Frieson, 1989). While Grigg and Frieson (1989) look at the relationship between parents and women with anorexia nervosa, it may also be important to examine the relations between and among other family members such as siblings. What role if any does this type of interaction play in the development of eating pathology? How do attitudes and behaviour of family members impact upon those with disturbed eating patterns? It may also be useful to consider the nature of the relationship and association among extended family members or within non traditional families. In particular, those established through remarriage or, families that do not represent the 'traditional' nuclear unit such as those based upon same sex relationships. These are additional areas of study which, if examined within future research, may contribute significantly in gaining a more in-depth understanding of this highly complex relationship.

In reviewing the psychoanalytical research which focuses specifically on the importance of the mother daughter relationship, there may also be a number of issues of concern. This research places an excessive burden on the role of the mother in contributing to the development of eating pathology. In so doing, it raises an important question. While this argument places the mother as the primary caregiver who is seen as responsible for the inability of the infant to develop a sense of self, would an alternative caregiver, male or female, play the same role? Or, as the literature suggests, is only the mother primarily deemed responsible for this underdeveloped sense of identity
within the child? Moreover, through this intense focus on the mother daughter bond, this type of analysis is unable to address the issue of eating disorders among males. While this number has been shown to be exceptionally small, it is nonetheless deserving of consideration within the literature.

One line of inquiry points to the conflicts surrounding the feminine role and postulates that women with eating disorders in devoting themselves to fulfilling the traditional notion of wifehood, motherhood, and intimacy, fail to develop their sense of self worth. Yet in focusing on the feminine role, how do males fit into this picture? What are the contradictions surrounding the adherence to the traditional conception of the masculine role within society and what, if any part do they play in the development of eating pathology among men?

Similar issues may be argued with respect to the literature I have summarized surrounding the relationship between sexual trauma and disordered eating patterns. In much of the literature exploring sexual abuse among those with eating disorders, self reports were used in attaining the data. While this is an important means through which valuable information may be obtained, this method of reporting may leave open considerable room for inaccuracy. There are a number of elements associated with the experience of sexual abuse such as shame, guilt, low self esteem and denial. All of these emotions have an impact upon subject responses regarding the incidence of abuse and may result in an underestimation of the occurrence of sexual trauma. Moreover, while the research that examines the nature and extent of the relationship between sexual assault and the development of eating pathology among females points to an important area of inquiry, it may also be particularly useful to consider the effects, if any, of sexual trauma among
men who suffer from various disturbed eating patterns.

The literature surrounding unwanted sexual trauma appears to point to the existence of an important connection between this abuse among those who subsequently experience problem eating behaviour. In these studies, there appears to be a strong level of body dissatisfaction or self hatred among those who experience sexual abuse. This becomes translated into the infliction of harm to the body through such methods as intense starvation or binge purging behaviour. This leads me to suggest that it may also be important to consider the possible relationship between the incidence of unprotected sexual behaviour with numerous partners, and the prevalence of eating disorders. Given the danger in the spread of sexually transmitted diseases such as AIDS/HIV through unprotected sexual relations, this behaviour is potentially life threatening and harmful to the body. I would speculate that there may be a link between dangerous sexual practices and dangerous eating practices. Both types of behaviour focus on negative feelings surrounding body image and self concept, where the body becomes used as a tool of manipulation and control. It may be that self hatred which leads to potentially harmful sexual behaviour becomes translated into abuse and infliction of harm upon the body through dangerous eating practices. I feel that this is an important area of inquiry for future research.

2.4 Gender Roles

While considering the individual and the variables addressed in contributing to and maintaining disordered eating patterns, the research surrounding issues of masculinity and femininity and adherence to specific gender roles has produced inconsistent results. It has been suggested that women who develop disturbed eating patterns typically display greater
problems with socially constructed gender role expectations. In particular those who develop bulimia have been found to conform more rigidly to the traditional and stereotypical feminine roles within society and are more likely to gain fulfilment through relationships with others (Rost et al, 1982). Conversely, it has also been suggested that women who develop disordered eating patterns actively reject the conservative view of the feminine role and gain a sense of control through this denial of traditional femininity (Orbach, 1978). Regardless of the nature of this relationship, the connection between gender role attitudes and behaviour and disturbed patterns of eating has become the focus of considerable research.

In a study of 540 female residents between the ages of twenty and thirty two residing in the Netherlands, Van Strien (1989), was unable to provide strong support for a positive correlation between dieting, body image and more feminine or masculine sex typed women. However, she did establish that in addition to the degree of masculinity or femininity, other variables including level of education, levels of anxiety and satisfaction with body figure were found to be equally important. It was suggested that with the concurrence of femininity and anxiety on the one hand, and level of education on the other, those women dissatisfied with their figure are exposed to opposing pressures of female responsibilities and professional expectations which, may be accompanied by fear of failure or lack of control (Van Strien, 1989).

The importance of additional variables was similarly considered in a study by Hawkins and Turell (1983) where body weight was found to be unrelated to measures of psychological masculinity and femininity. However, sex differences were found in the relationship of masculinity and femininity to dieting tendencies, dissatisfaction with physical appearance and
achievement motivation in the sample of college students (Hawkins & Turell, 1983).

Rost et al. (1982) examined the relationship between sex role characteristics and bulimic eating behaviour and found a discrepancy in real versus actual sex role behaviour. While the women displayed a liberated attitude of women's social positioning, their actual sex role related behaviour displayed a sharp contrast to this attitude. In addition to being considerably more passive, dependent and unassertive in their actions, the high level of external control from those around them combined with the low level of internal control they experienced, produced a sense of ineffectiveness among the bulimic women (Rost et al, 1982).

Conversely Cantelon, Leichner and Harper (1986), in their study surrounding perceived role conflict, uncovered no support for the assertion that women with disordered eating patterns would display more discrepancy between actual and ideally perceived sex role identity and greater sex role dissatisfaction. However, the researchers did identify a trend for the bulimic women to view themselves as more feminine than either the anorexic or control group. In addition, the women in all groups expressed the wish to become more androgynous from undifferentiated and feminine actual identities suggesting the desire to assume more masculine traits (Cantelon et al, 1986).

The influence of discrepancy between real and ideal perceptions of masculinity and femininity on eating disorders and attitudes was similarly explored by Johnson and Petrie (1995). Drawing on the discrepancy theory which postulates that women with disturbed eating patterns lack traditional masculine qualities and are conflicted between society's incompatible demands to be more masculine and to achieve traditional femininity, the
findings of the study presented positive support for this assertion (Johnson & Petrie, 1995). It was discovered that individuals who are experiencing greater gender discrepancy are more likely to display disordered eating patterns and that women who are dissatisfied with their gender orientation generally desire more masculine characteristics.

In a similar study examining bulimic women and their sex role orientation in comparison to those within a normal control group, the findings indicated that these women did not possess “hyperfeminine” self concepts but were instead over represented within the “undifferentiated” category whereby they scored lower on both the Masculinity and Femininity scales (Lewis & Johnson, 1985). While poor self esteem, rather than sex role identity, was viewed as a likely influence on women’s over representation within this category, the absence of a clear sense of self identity among those who display bulimic patterns of behaviour was also considered a possible explanation for this distribution.

Drawing on Erickson’s conception of “identity diffusion” or an inability to make a commitment to a single view of the self, the authors postulated that those individuals having more of a problem than their peers in consolidating an identity, display a reduced capacity for regulating the tensions associated with the problematic transitional period from late teens to early twenties. Moreover in examining the widely held conception of “hyperfemininity” it was suggested that while this conception refers to the high endorsement of traditional role expectations and a strong sense of identity among women, an undifferentiated identity may represent a very different type of feminine identification. A woman with an undifferentiated identity is more likely to respond to the needs, expectations and values of her family and those around her and in regulating her self interests in favour of
others, may be viewed as highly feminine.

In examining the sex role orientation among college students and its relationship to disturbed eating patterns, the findings of a study by Squires and Kagan (1985) suggested that compulsive eating was associated with the perception of being unfeminine while those who engaged in restricted dieting practices perceived themselves as high in feminine qualities. The need for social approval was also identified as a significant factor in a woman's eating behaviour and in her attitude towards feminine roles such that the more a subject needed social approval and the more she conformed to the socially defined feminine profile, the more she tended to diet. This supported the theory that dieting and concern with body weight are inherent in femininity as it is currently defined by young adults (Squires & Kagan, 1985).

Cantrell & Ellis (1981), on the other hand, found no such relationship in their study which challenged the correlation between eating dysfunction and the conventional stereotypical feminine identification. In looking at both women and men it was found that for both sexes, masculinity and androgyny were related to weight preoccupation. For women, femininity was associated with weight preoccupation and low self esteem. This led the authors to suggest the possibility of an alternative explanation, that eating disorders are not more frequent in women because of the inherent "femaleness" of the disorder but because of the complex transition of the female role in our culture (Cantrell & Ellis, 1981).

This was reinforced in a similar examination of the sex role ideology among a sample of college students where it was further found that both bulimic and anorexic women did not significantly differ from the control group in their adherence to traditionally female roles of identity (Srikameswaran, Leichner & Harper, 1984). The bulimic group were more
feminist in their views than the anorexic group and the authors also noted a complete switching of the preferred roles. While some anorexic patients were found to be more traditional in their goal as women, other bulimic women were viewed as career oriented and professionally involved. Yet one of the most important findings suggested that both anorexic and bulimic women were in general engaged in goals through their life for the benefit of others as opposed to for themselves (Srikameswaran et al, 1984).

One of the primary issues of concern surrounding the gender roles research that I analyzed is that, like much of the literature here, it contains a number of methodological limitations. Its focus on small samples of females may serve to limit the generalizability of the findings. Moreover, the majority of the studies I examined were undertaken in a college or university setting which also serves to exclude those who may be poorly represented within this subset of the population including but not limited to, minority groups, the lower class, or older individuals.

Another issue deserving of attention, is the process by which certain sex roles were measured in exploring the relationship between gender role endorsement and eating pathology. Through the use of measures such as the "Sex Role Ideology Scale", subjects were asked to respond to their beliefs about sex roles within society. Yet through this method, the accuracy of responses may be questionable. Subjects may be more at risk in failing to reflect true feelings surrounding various socially constructed roles. As in several other studies surrounding issues of a sensitive nature, one of the most difficult aspects in adhering to self reports in attaining data, is the likelihood that stigma associated with certain beliefs may discourage the admission of these opinions for inclusion within the data.

Lastly, the methods used in measuring the types of sex roles may be
called into question. In this type of analysis it is important to encompass a range of behaviours within the definition of sex roles. Too narrow a range of features embodied by the constructed definition of masculinity and femininity, may both limit, and skew the findings in this highly complicated line of research. As Cantrell and Ellis suggest, this type of exploration contributes to a growing body of literature in which the relationship between gender role and eating dysfunction is complex and requires multidimensional conceptualizations (Cantrell & Ellis, 1991:53). A more conceptually based measure of femininity and masculinity may advance the line of research further and expand on this type of exploratory analysis.

2.5 Sociocultural Factors

There are a number of studies that look at media influence on eating pathology each one targeting different ways in which this relationship may be mediated. Several researchers have examined the historical trends in the representation of the female body image. The relationship between the shift in cultural standards of the ideal female figure and the pressure to diet within our society was examined in a comparative analysis of body measurements among Playboy magazine models and Miss America Pageant contestants over a twenty year period (Garner, Garfinkel, Schwartz, & Thompson, 1980).

The findings indicated that there has been a gradual move towards a thinner ideal of attractiveness for women as confirmed by the standards set out within the Miss America and Playboy data (Garner et al, 1980). However, given that coinciding with this change, the average white North American female is in fact becoming larger, the research suggests that with such an intense pressure on women to meet the ideal body type expectations there is often an increase in the likelihood of negative consequences both physical
and emotional to these women. Through internalization of these negative feelings women may become increasingly at risk for the development of disordered eating behaviour.

In extending this examination further Wiseman, Gray, Mosimann and Ahrens (1992) looked at the same context of Playboy and Miss America models ten years after the original study by Garner et al. (1980). They found that the body size of the women remained not only as thin as before, but had in fact moved towards an even thinner ideal (Wiseman et al, 1992).

Through an analysis of the various images presented within a number of media outlets, Silverstein, Perdue, Peterson and Kelly (1986) attempted to provide support for their assertions surrounding the influential role of the mass media in promoting a thin ideal body type. In this study they explored the indirect effects of this representation in contributing to the high occurrence of eating disorders among young women. In looking at the changing images of women's bodies within each medium, including magazines and television, their analysis did appear to suggest that the standard of bodily attractiveness within the mass media in North America has moved towards a thinner ideal over the past forty to fifty years. While the authors suggest that it is difficult to predict the exact effects of these images on women and their eating patterns, their research does bring attention to the need to examine the ways in which the mass media plays a role within this complex relationship (Silverstein et al, 1986).

In examining the changing body image of modelling agency fashion models, Morris, Cooper and Cooper (1989) found that over a twenty year period from 1967 to 1987, the shape of the models changed dramatically towards a more tubular female form. The research discovered that as the models became much taller and sleeker, their bust and hip size decreased
significantly relative to the size of the waist.

Other studies have looked at the female images within various mass media outlets. Myers and Biocca (1992) explored in detail the influential role of television advertising on female body perception. Through exposure to body image advertising and body image programming which focused specifically on the representation of thin ideal body types, the researchers measured the extent to which female undergraduate students perceived their own body size based on these representations. The results indicated that the women initially did not reject their own body image in favour of the thinner ideal, but in fact became less depressed about their own size. The authors postulated that the women initially interpreted the thin representation within the material as an attainable goal for themselves. The images provoked the women to fantasize about their own body within this ideal weight allowing them to believe in this representation as a possible attainment for themselves. However, in the long term the women, when faced with the reality of their own body shape which failed to live up to this thin ideal, would develop depression and discontent resulting in a greater risk for the development of disordered eating patterns.

Similarly, Spillman and Everington (1989) examined the extent to which the the thin ideal within the media correlated with women's preoccupation with thinness and body image and in so doing analyzed three body types - ectomorph (thin body type), mesomorph (muscular body type), and endomorph (heavier body build) - in relation to various characteristics such as friendliness, competence and likelihood of professional success. The ectomorph or thin ideal type was associated with a number of positive features. In assigning the thin ideal with positive attributes including most sexually appealing, most likely to get dates and, most likely to be concerned
with exercise and nutrition, this image was considered the most desirable body shape among the female students.

Other studies have looked at the ways in which the promotion of thinness is represented within the content of various mass media vehicles. In looking at popular magazines read by both males and females, one study found the existence of ten times as much diet and weight loss related information in magazines read most frequently by women compared to those considered male magazines (Anderson & DiDomenico, 1992). The researchers suggested support for the hypothesis that the “comparative frequency of eating disorders in males vs. females is more closely related to the differing extent of gender-related reinforcement of related dieting behaviour than any known biological parameter” (Anderson & DiDomenica, 1992:283).

Garner et al. (1980) analyzed several women’s magazines over a twenty year period and found a significant increase in the number of diet and weight loss articles. In a replication of this study ten years later, similar results were found by Wiseman et al. (1992), showing a dramatic increase in the number of weight reduction and diet articles over a twenty year period. However, in addition to this increase, the researchers found that in the last eight years of their analysis, the amount of material focusing on exercise and fitness surpassed the number of diet articles.

Through a content analysis of women’s and men’s magazines Silverstein et al. (1986) examined the extent to which each type of publication promoted messages towards slimness and weight loss. In looking at advertisements and articles that focused on dieting, body image and shape, weight loss products, as well as food advertisements and recipes, the researchers found a significantly greater focus on thinness and staying in shape within women’s magazines compared to men’s. This suggests that the
messages received in these magazines are gender specific with a biased focus on women to stay slim.

Considering the media's portrayal of an idealized female body image, other researchers have explored the influence of this portrayal on body image distortion among women with eating disorders (Hamilton & Waller, 1993). In comparing effects of viewing photographs taken from fashion magazines against more neutral images, it was discovered that there was some connection between body image overestimation and media exposure. It was noted that while the media presentation of an idealized beauty image may be an important determinant of body image self perception among these women, it is only one factor in this complex dynamic.

A similar study examined the sociocultural pressures presented within the mass media and looked at the extent to which internalization of these pressures mediated the effects of the thin ideal of bodily attractiveness (Stice, Schpak-Neuberg, Shaw & Stein, 1994). Using cross sectional data to explore the extent to which media exposure directly influenced gender role endorsement, eating pathology and internalization of the ideal body stereotype, Stice et al. (1994) uncovered a positive correlation between media exposure and eating disorder symptomatology. It was shown that gender role endorsement within the media influenced the internalization of the ideal body stereotype which in turn mediated the relationship to body dissatisfaction and disordered eating. The researchers suggested that women directly modelled disordered eating behaviour presented within the mass media.

Another study examined the direct impact of media imagery on women with disordered eating patterns. Here, the measurement of self image was used to analyze the influence of advertising messages that conveyed
slininess and a thin body construct (Peterson, 1987). The results of the study on female college students indicated that both bulimic and anorexic women had very different self images from those without eating pathology, and when raised through advertisements, presented a greater level of anxiety about personal appearance.

Much of the sociocultural literature I have examined surrounding the media's presentation of ideal standards of beauty has looked at the trend towards a thinner ideal within various forms of media outlets. From television to magazines, this literature has examined these trends within both the imagery and the editorial content of mass media vehicles of popular culture. A longitudinal analysis such as this is invaluable in that it allows the researcher to examine the direction of changing body images over an extended period of time and in so doing, may draw attention to historical patterns exemplified by these presentations. Yet it does not allow the researcher to identify a causal connection between the thinner ideal standards of beauty presented within the media, and the subsequent proliferation of eating pathology among young women.

While this type of research is valuable in and of itself, it is limited in many ways and serves as only one strand within this complex relationship. In enhancing the sociocultural literature surrounding eating pathology, studies such as those by Stice et al. (1994) and Hamilton and Waller (1993), may expand this analysis. These studies explore in more detail, the actual impact of media imagery on the intended audience that is constantly bombarded with distinct messages surrounding ideal body images. Examining the possible psychological and behavioural effects of such messages may serve as an important tool in gaining a more complete understanding of this complex issue. In much of the literature that I examined, it was difficult to determine
to what extent the media caused the obsessive preoccupation with body image among women, or to specify the relative importance of the media in relation to other sources that women were exposed to. The research was also unable to capture the mediating variables, including but not limited to, biological, cognitive or personality traits that may moderate these powerful media messages and the development of eating pathology among women and young girls.

An important aspect of the research surrounding the powerful force of the media in presenting certain ideal standards of attractiveness, is the ability to explore the actual impact on those who are exposed to these representations. While the limited scope of my thesis will not allow me to examine this arena in detail through in-depth interviews or extensive questionnaires for example, I feel that my analysis serves as an important step in opening up this area of inquiry. In the next chapter I will present my own interpretive analysis surrounding the media's construction of an idealized body image and explore the negotiation of these standards of beauty through the stages of my personal experience with, and relationship to, eating pathology.

In the studies that did attempt to examine the impact of various media images on those who develop eating pathology, there were a number of elements within the research which may have limited the generalizability of the findings. In particular, the use of self report studies is one problematic area which may set limits on the reported data. In one study women were asked to report whether they suffered from either anorexia nervosa or bulimia and the relative severity of their disorder. Yet given the possible stigma associated with the issue of eating disorders and the likelihood that subjects may either deny the existence of, or withhold information
surrounding eating pathology, the conclusions within this type of analysis may require cautious interpretation. Subjects within this examination were also asked to report on the effects of the media's promotion of various beauty standards on their own self image. In this type of analysis, the results of this interpretive exploration must be carefully analyzed by the researcher to ensure that the subject's responses are truly reflected within the findings and accurate conclusions are subsequently drawn from the data.

Another possible limitation of the sociocultural research surrounding eating pathology was suggested in a study by Stice et al. (1994) in which it was asserted that, "... the measure of media exposure may not have been precise enough to optimally capture the effects of exposure to the thin ideal" (p.839). While several of the studies I have drawn attention to, in examining the changing images of beauty ideals over extended periods of time, looked at a large amount of material, other research analyzed only a small subset of the vast array of material that exists. Exposing subjects to a wider range of material may more adequately capture the impact of such media imagery and allow the researcher to make more generalizable assertions.

Much like a great deal of the other research surrounding eating pathology, the sociocultural literature largely fails to draw distinctions between various types of disturbed eating disorders, instead exploring both anorexia nervosa, bulimia and any behaviour in between, as a single construct rather than a continuum of eating patterns. It is important, however, that the research draw attention to the fact that somewhat different factors may play a role in the development of each type of eating disorder. In my analysis, I will attempt to draw attention to the way in which my own negotiation of media imagery was mediated by my experiences along the continuum of eating pathology. It may also be important to draw a distinction
between different types of media outlets. While several studies addressed the presentation of standards of beauty within such areas as magazines, television or movies, their findings are specific to this particular area of media study and may not necessarily be generalizable to other outlets. Just as my own exploration will look at the difference in two types of publications within the same medium of women's magazines, it is important to draw attention to the variations within the vast realm of mass media.

Lastly, the sociocultural literature is limited to a large degree by the sample population chosen for much of the research. The focus primarily on female college students between the ages of eighteen to twenty four serves to exclude within the findings many of those, particularly people of colour, lower classes and older individuals, who may be impacted quite differently by the effects of the media's promotion of certain ideal standards of beauty.

2.6 Media Promotion of Thin Ideal

Body preoccupation has become a societal mania. We've become a nation of appearance junkies and fitness zealots, pioneers driven to think, talk, strategize, and worry about our bodies with the same fanatical devotion we applied to putting a man on the moon. Abroad, we strive for global peace. At home, we have declared war on our bodies. (Rodin, 1992:57)

By focusing on the social context within which eating disorders occur we can move the focus away from the individual to look at the environment within which women in particular are influenced. Rodin (1992) argues that, "of all the industrial achievements of the 20th century that influence how we feel about our bodies, none has had a more profound effect than the rise of the mass media" (p.57). There are a number of ways in which the media's promotion of a thin ideal of bodily attractiveness may be explored as a possible determinant in the purported increase in eating disorders. "Through movies, magazines and TV, we see beautiful people as often as we see our
own family members: the net effect is to make exceptional beauty appear real and attainable.... Like a pervasive Narcissus, woman today looks at her reflection in the mirror and finds it wanting -- and then is consumed by a quest to make herself fit the reflection the media has conditioned her to expect is possible” (Rodin,1992:57). Yet the reflection she sees is seldom average nor does it represent an attainable standard of beauty for most women. Instead women are bombarded on billboards and television, in fashion magazines and on the runways of Paris, London and Milan with images of young, thin, shapeless girls representing what has become professed as the ideal female body image.

Through this image, epitomized by supermodels like 5'7”, 105 pound waif thin Kate Moss, thinness has become promoted as a symbol of beauty and success (Garner et al,1980). The runways, filled with models parading the latest designer fashions and magazines displaying the season’s trends, have been the breeding ground for this representation. Yet, while the fashion industry may feel justified in their use of the thin skeletal like frames of those who starve to survive as the only suitable canvass upon which designer creations may be displayed, this portrayal of an unrealistic standard of beauty stretches far beyond the boundaries of the world of runway modelling.

In 1992, manager of the British branch of the Omega watch company pulled an advertisement in Vogue magazine and boycotted the publication after his outrage at the “extremely distasteful and irresponsible” use of ultra thin models in the campaign, only to have his decision overturned by higher authorities within the company. Fashion designer Calvin Klein has also become the subject of a great deal of controversy surrounding his advertising campaign depicting Kate Moss and other sickly looking young models sporting his infamous blue jeans and underwear (Poulton,1996:200). A
controversial term has more recently been applied to the images of many models within the media who depict a look of starvation characterized by pale, thin bodies and gaunt, stark facial expressions. This label, 'heroin chic,' describes an image for both men and women that is characteristic of a heroin addict or 'junkie.' Those who are seen to epitomize this 'look' display a sickly, almost unearthly appearance reflective of a combination of too little sleep and too many drugs. This concept has been the subject of a great deal of controversy and has been denied by many, particularly those within the fashion world. Yet its very existence within an industry defined by beauty and glamour, may be cause for concern.

Poulton suggests that, "editors and writers [have] developed amnesia about all but one body type" (1996:74). Television and movie actresses are getting thinner and thinner while the consequences for those who fail to move with this trend have reinforced the very real association between thinness and success. While Oprah may be accepted by television viewers around the world whether she is fat or thin, she has become idolized as a symbol of weight loss success. Yet if Oprah had chosen to go with the flow and remain the size that works with, rather than against biology, what then? Would we not find a reason to justify her decision without considering for one moment the possibility that she may feel happier with herself at a larger or rather 'normal' size.

Those who fail to conform to the expectations surrounding an ideal thin body image within the media pay a high price. For several years television star Delta Burke was "... hounded about her escalating weight by her producers, humiliated in the press, and ultimately fired," while more recently Janeane Garofalo was required to lose 35 pounds before she landed a lead role in the major motion picture The Truth about Cats and Dogs
This emphasis on thinness may have contributed to the increasing number of female actresses and media personalities who have developed eating disorders. Jane Fonda, who reportedly prefers herself “closer to the bone”, has been bulimic for over twenty years, while Sally Field developed bulimia in response to feeling “immensely unattractive (because) everybody....was Twiggy except me” (Poulton, 1996:42). Other women whose issues with eating disorders have become publicly acknowledged include Karen Carpenter, whose battle with anorexia ended her life, Paula Abdul, Tracey Gold (who was fired from her TV series as a result of uncontrollable anorexia), and Christina Applegate (Poulton, 1996:126).

Media stars have become the poster women in equating thinness and slimness with health and success. In the September 1996 issue of Shape magazine, Jane Fonda was featured as the recipient of the magazine’s first ever Lifetime Achievement Award in Fitness. The article praises Fonda for being responsible for bringing the benefits of exercise and healthy eating into the forefront when only medical experts were really paying attention and, for reinforcing the positive relationship between women’s health and self confidence. Yet given Fonda’s battle with bulimia for a large portion of her life, is a positive message really being sent to those women who aspire to the ideal that she epitomizes? The media’s definition of feminine beauty as thin and childlike has been upheld by,

... interlocking institutional powers: a multi million dollar weight-reducing industry in which most of the consumers are women; medical professionals who maintain the dubious assumption that fat is by definition unhealthy and ought to be eliminated; a multi-million-dollar advertising industry that promotes demeaning images of women; a job market in which women who do not fit this model of beauty face discrimination; and an insurance industry that upholds medically prescribed standards of what constitutes a healthy body size. (Thompson, 1994:6)

Through the creation of this multimillion dollar diet and weight loss...
industry, the pursuit of slenderness has been further intensified. The infinite number of pills, potions, wonder diets and books in pursuit of thinness have skyrocketed over the past twenty years to a total annual spending in North America on weight loss and diet products and services of more than $40 billion dollars (Poulton, 1996:78). By the turn of the century this figure is expected to rise to $77 billion dollars (Rodin, 1992:58). In addition, “in 1981 Business Week estimated that ‘the diet-food business ... represents... the fastest-growing segment of the food industry [with] 6.6% of all U.S. food sales [for a total of] $450 million... excluding soft drinks, which bring in an additional $400 million” (Poulton, 1996:63). While these figures represent the scope of this industry in the United States alone, they are reflective of a health and fitness arena which appears to be growing and expanding at an unbelievable rate.

One of the primary ways in which this vast array of weight loss, diet and fitness initiatives have gained increasing popularity is through their endorsement by celebrities and media personalities whose representation as a symbol of beauty and success, serves as a testament to their effectiveness. From exercise equipment like Tony Little’s abdominizer, and Suzanne Sommers ‘thigh’ and ‘butt’master, to powdered milkshakes and commercial weight loss programs, the media is replete with celebrities attributing success and happiness to the products and services they wholeheartedly endorse. There is little mention of the reality that around 95% of those who lose weight through dieting, return to their initial weight or gain additional weight within three years (Dolan & Gitzinger, 1994).

The popularity of the liquid protein diet reportedly skyrocketed after Oprah Winfrey’s incredible 67 pound weight loss. After gaining the weight back, she began again with a more ‘sensible’ weight loss program combining
healthy nutrition with an exercise regime, together with a special cook book
detailing favourite Oprah recipes which subsequently became the flavour of
the month. Replacing one weight loss initiative with another may be
evidence that, “the dieting industry remains one of the more lucrative areas
to be in, despite the fact that its success is built upon its customers’ failure”
(Dolan & Gitzinger, 1994:2).

The anti fat message and the fascination with the slim body image that
resounds throughout our culture has been further promoted by the
increasing numbers of weight loss centres and commercial diet programs that
assist thousands of women a year in their quest for successful weight
reduction. From Jenny Craig and Weight Watchers to Nutri System and the
Body Science Weight Loss Plan, these programs promise the world, yet with
failure rates of between 95 and 98 percent, they may cause further
disappointment in this growing obsession with weight and body image
(Poulton, 1996:84).

Using ‘before and after’ pictures, the hope of happiness and a more
fulfilling lifestyle is clearly represented in the expressions of those whose
weight has shielded them from the outside world. Yet the same catchy
slogans, ‘1 800 97 Jenny’, and ‘lose all the weight you want for just pennies a
day’ that convince us success is just around the corner, may also serve to
cloak the reality that exists in the fine print. In this quest to attain the ideal
figure, the only thing shrinking is the size of our bank accounts and the
answer to Jenny Craig’s catch phrase ‘What have you got to lose?’ ironically
may be everything (Poulton, 1996).

The print medium has also become inundated with material
surrounding weight loss and diet related issues. In 1995 there were more
than 700 weight loss related books including The Beverly Hills Diet, The 120
Year Diet, The Rice Diet Report and the Fat to Muscle Diet, to name a few (Poulton, 1996:81). More recently, media personalities such as Susan Powter and Richard Simmons have promoted a healthier regime, built upon alternative methods of weight loss and maintenance. Retail and video stores are filled with countless exercise and fitness tapes by professionals such as Karen Voight, as well as others like Cindy Crawford and Claudia Schiffer, whose own body image has become a symbol of success in the pursuit of, and preoccupation with an ideal body image. As Rodin (1992) suggests, “the media now appears to expose us to this single right look, and the beauty industry promises it is attainable by all” (p.58).

Magazine articles are also reflective of this concern with weight and body issues. While a survey of Ladies Home Journal issues from the 1960’s revealed the existence of diet related articles only every six months, this stands in sharp contrast to the distribution of weight loss material within the pages of today’s popular women’s magazines (Rodin, 1992). The covers of magazines from Cosmopolitan to Modern Woman display a range of headlines focusing on the pursuit on an ideal body image including such articles as, “eat to be lean”, “hate your looks? What it means when your mirror lies”, “workout dos and dont’s”, “get the abs of your dreams”, and “yoga for hard tight thighs” (Shape, May 1997; Fit, May 1997).

Amidst the vast array of weight loss, diet and beauty products, the fitness industry with its annual revenues in 1992 estimated at $8 billion dollars in the United States and over $321 million in Canada, also plays a significant role in this obsessive preoccupation with body image (Poulton, 1996:81). In promoting fitness and exercise as a key component in maintaining a healthy lifestyle, advertisements for health clubs represent women who are often underweight and exceptionally thin. Moreover, in
representing this quest for physical perfection through fitness as a means to gain control over their lives, the association of overweight and lazy versus thin and active is further strengthened. “Like a set of worry beads, we always have our calories to count, our minutes of aerobics to execute. If everything else in our lives seems out of control, we at least have our diet and exercise regimens” (Rodin, 1992:58). While the fit and self controlled get off the couch and into the gym, the overweight sit at home and do nothing.

The emphasis on thinness within the media is also promoted by the anti fat attitude that has become ingrained within this medium. “The other side of society’s approval of abstinence and thinness is its revulsion for obesity and excessive eating” (Schwartz et al., 1982:23). By conveying messages that reinforce the repulsion of fat and weight gain, the media plays on the dichotomy between fat and thin. While “thinness has come to symbolise certain cherished notions within our culture, for example self-discipline, control, sexual liberation, assertiveness and competitiveness...,” excess weight is constructed as the opposite (Nassar, 1988:574). In extolling the virtues of thinness, the media promotes a negative or undesirable portrayal of fat, powerful enough to keep many women fearful of all that it represents.

Through the media and entertainment women have become conditioned to despise and feel repelled by images of “fat chicks”. Rather than challenging the stereotypes surrounding fat in relation to femininity and beauty, the greeting cards of lingerie clad obese women in provocative poses merely serve to reinforce our bias further through humour. As long as fat remains something that should not be considered sexy, sensual or erotic, and provided we continue to laugh along with women like Roseanne or Rosie because we find them funny but not attractive, women’s identificatory role models will continue to be those who represent an image far removed from
the reality of our own bodies.

It has been suggested that there is a feeling of negativity towards anyone who seems unconcerned with, and who does not strive to emulate the ideal standard of beauty (Poulton, 1996). This feeling of resentment may come from what excess weight represents for many women within Western culture. In her insightful book, Terry Poulton suggests that the anger towards those who have failed to achieve thinness, comes from the feeling that the "Fat Chick appears to be enjoying the pleasures her slender sisters are denying themselves. Even worse is the implicit assumption that she's not only not playing the game, but actually repudiating the rules and ridiculing those who abide by them" (Poulton, 1996:116). By attributing the refusal to engage in weight control as a lack of self control, the cultural stereotyping of the overweight as sloppy and lazy and the slim as attractive and conscientious becomes further strengthened (Nagel & Jones, 1992).

Our obsession with thinness is promoted and reinforced as much by what the media fails to tell us, as it is by the messages that it conveys. We are seldom informed about the crucial role of biology in determining our weight loss and dieting success. The image of slenderness promoted within the media is not a possibility for many women whose body types may never achieve this desired look. Thus, Rodin argues that, "the body is not infinitely malleable in the way that advertisers with a product to sell would have us believe.... Genes play a major role in setting metabolism as well as body shape and size: they determine how much fat we burn, how much we can store easily, and where it's distributed on our bodies"(1992:59). Yet this information does not appear to be readily available or widely distributed to the average person and the limitations of our physiology are no match for the media's powerful message that convince us anything is possible. "Whatever our
weight, we are flimflammed into forgetting that nature credits us in a rich variety of shapes and sizes -- and believing instead that anyone who cannot permanently clone the physique of the thinnest 5 per cent of the female population is a contemptible, unlovable failure" (Poulton, 1996:216).

Rodin (1992) suggests that the media sends the message that with healthy eating, exercise, hard work and effort, anyone can look good. In presenting the notion that will power, personal strength and a few essential products and services are everything needed to achieve the ideal notion of beauty, the failure to attain this ideal becomes attributed to personal ineffectiveness rather than the limitations that biology has created. (Rodin, 1992). While this message places a great deal of pressure particularly on women, to achieve a desired standard of attractiveness, it is especially damaging amidst the conception that our bodies and how we look are a sign of something much greater. For many women within Western society, value and social worth is measured against how they appear on the outside. Beauty does not appear to be only skin deep. Rather, appearance has become a defining characteristic in all facets of our culture. Those who do not live up to what society has deemed an acceptable standard of beauty, often become guilty of a much greater sin: moral failure (Rodin, 1992). As Rodin asserts, as the desire to be good has become replaced with the desire to look good, we pursue this obsessive preoccupation with thinness at all costs (1992:58).

The media presents the idea that our bodies are a work in progress and just like the countless actresses, musicians and media personalities who have been 'nipped, tucked, lifted and separated', we too, can be rearranged and reconstructed to achieve the ideal body that we were really meant to have. In increasing numbers, many women who have both the resources and the inclination, are using every method possible as they strive towards the
attainment of ideal beauty. While often detrimental and damaging to the health, face lifts, liposuction and wonder diets are a handful of the methods used by those for whom the ultimate template of beauty is just a few dollars and a few procedures away (Rodin, 1992).

It appears that for some women, particularly white, middle upper class females, plastic surgery has become commonplace within today’s North American society and the 61% increase in “aesthetic” surgery over the past decade may be a testament to its popularity as a quick fix solution in attaining the ultimate body ideal (Rodin, 1992:59). However, as Poulton (1996) points out, this process is creating standards of attractiveness and, “… cultural norms that are way out of sync with our biological heritage” (p.75). They are standards which are having a profound impact on the limits that women are going to in their preoccupation with their bodies.

2.7 Changing Conceptions of Feminine Beauty

Orbach claims that “it is not simply that the last few decades have witnessed an acceleration in the rate of changing aesthetics of the female form, but that this has coincided with the rise of interest in fashion and body-image among the majority of women” (1986:72). While the cultural preoccupation with thinness that exists in today’s society is promoted within almost every mass media outlet, this standard of feminine beauty that has today become prescribed as the socially accepted ideal, has not always represented the epitomy of female beauty.

With the transformation of clothing fashions, the emergence of women’s magazines and the participation in mass consumer culture, the pressure to conform to the current standards of feminine appeal has increased accordingly. “The impact of movies, television and mass culture in general
has created a population responsive to imitate and take up the received images of femininity. These images project a few limited body types for women, and the designated female beauties of the moment correspond to these body types” (Orbach, 1986:72).

Within the Western world up until approximately 100 years ago, the most desirable female form was one that reflected the natural fullness and amplitude of the body. Statues, paintings and artistic tradition presented a distribution of images portraying women's generous abundance as a reflection of fertility and health. The plumpness of female nudes was emphasized in varying ways according to fashion with, “... big, ripe bellies from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries, plump faces and shoulders in the early nineteenth, progressively generous dimpled buttocks and thighs until the twentieth. ...” (Wolf, 1991:184). Far from undesirable, these images represented an ideal of beauty against which anything else was seen to reflect the “... look of sickness, the look of poverty, and the look of nervous exhaustion” (Wolf, 1991:184).

During the nineteenth century, two very different images of feminine beauty emerged. The “steel engraving women” whose body was frail and delicate, with small hands and feet and a clear, blush complexion, was admired for both her beauty as well as her high social status. The “voluptuous woman” who reflected a heavier, bustier conception of feminine beauty, was found to more frequently represented within lower class women including prostitutes and actresses (Mazur, 1986:284). This diversity in feminine beauty continued in the pre-World War One years where the voluptuous, heavy legged woman and the slender, small waisted, delicate female form were joined by a new fictitious image of beauty named the “Gibson Girl”. She was named after her originator Charles Dana Gibson,
who as an illustrator for Life magazine, created this influential image of feminine appeal that combined elements of the “voluptuous” and “steel engraving” woman of the time. The Gibson Girls were represented by a slender line and a large bust and hips portraying an athletic image (Mazur, 1986).

This representation of the female form drastically changed after the end of World War One when waistlines were let out, hemlines rose and women’s bodies were characterized as curveless, shapeless forms. With an emphasis on the face and legs, the image represented in the twenties what was known as the “flapper” and reflected an almost complete absence of female sexual characteristics, where attractiveness and feminine beauty were based upon the ability to look “as narrow as an arrow” (Poulton, 1996:48). With the emergence of the flapper, many women abandoned their elaborate hairstyles and clothing, escaped the restriction of corsets and undergarments and ate less in an effort to achieve an androgynous, boyish silhouette.

Magazines and catalogues presenting women’s fashions reflected this changing image of the female figure with trends that de-emphasized hips and curves and promoted alternative ways in which the slender lines of the body could be expressed. This focus on the thin ideal figure was illustrated in a 1918 edition Vogue magazine which asserted that, “there is one crime against the modern ethics of beauty which is unpardonable; far better it is to commit any number of petty crimes than to be guilty of growing fat” (Poulton, 1996:49).

This look was further promoted on the big screen with actresses like Clara Bow and Mary Pickford whose waif-like figures epitomized the thin ideal. In addition to magazines, movies and television, the medical and public health literature during this time became increasingly focused on weight loss and diet related issues. At an Adult Weight Conference in 1926
organized by several medical and public health authorities, one of the
speakers suggested that, "many of our flappers have mastered the art of eating	heir cake and yet not having it, inducing regurgitation, after a plentiful meal,
either by drugs or mechanical means" (Poulton, 1996:50).

The focus on this sexless, skinny image was eradicated after the 1930’s. As
hemlines fell again and the narrow waist became the focus of attention, the
sexual characteristics of the female form were reasserted once more (Mazur,1986). Curves were added to the slender lines of the flapper image of
the 1920’s but the focus still emphasized an absence of fat around the body.
While idealized breast sizes remained fairly small and became firmer, the real
focus was placed on legs where smooth, muscular legs adorned with high
healed pointed shoes became the sensual symbol of this female form. In
particular film stars such as Jean Harlow, Greeta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich
whose bust sizes were quite small, were especially noted for their face or legs
(Mazur, 1986:290).

This image proliferated through the 1940’s as more muscular bodies
and increased breast sizes produced a feminine ideal that was, like the
standards of today, somewhat unrealistic for many women. “Buxom” stars of
Hollywood, such as Jane Russell or the “sweater girl” Lana Turner, were
representative of this ideal (Mazur,1986) This ideal beauty standard remained
fairly consistent during the Second World War. Magazines and advertising
during this time spent considerably less time on diet and weight loss related
material and paid more attention to women’s “break out of domestic
confinement” (Poulton, 1996:51).

As many women returned to the domestic sphere after the war, the
ideal of feminine beauty underwent another transformation. Magazines,
advertising, film and the new medium of television became filled with
articles on food and clothing, slimming and weight loss information and tips on how to stay slim and attractive while taking care of a loving family. This ideal female beauty standard emphasizing a slim figure continued into the 1950's when it was accompanied by several variations of this female form. While "Hollywood and the fashion industry successfully promoted large cleaved bustlines (and falsies), tiny cinch waists (and girdles), and wiggly-hipped walks (with high heels)"; epitomized by one of the most famous film stars of this time Marilyn Monroe, a move towards "slenderization" of the female body was also popularized (Mazur,1986:291). Hollywood stars Audrey Hepburn and Grace Kelly represented a very different image of female beauty which moved away from the sexualized images presented by Monroe. As Mazur (1986) suggests, Kelly and Hepburn exemplified a "subdued and classy sensuality, often associated with the aristocrat and high fashion, rather than the 'earthly' sexuality of Monroe and Sophia Loren" (p.294). As a result, notions of ideal feminine beauty were differentiated along distinct class lines.

In the 1960's, one of the most memorable images of feminine beauty gained popularity with the emergence in England of a thin, flat chested and shapeless model named Twiggy. "Her thinness, now commonplace, was shocking at the time;" and it was suggested that, "'Twiggy' is called Twiggy because she looks as though a strong gale would snap her in two and dash her to the ground. . ." (Wolf,1991:184). She was joined by another English model named Jean Shrimpton or "the Shrimp" who also broke from the voluptuous images that had become so widely popular in the earlier decade. With the arrival of this thin, barely there image, the already thriving fitness and diet industries expanded to unsurmountable heights. During the 1960's as the Beatles burst onto the US market, skirts became shorter and idealized legs slimmer as magazines overflowed with articles advocating exercise.
equipment and miracle weight loss secrets creating thinness as the ultimate ticket to not only women's happiness, but morality. Poulton argues that, "being slim was no longer just the best way to be attractive, or even healthy. Now it had become the same kind of fire and brimstone character issue that sexuality had been in Victorian times. Any woman who 'let herself go' was now regarded as a sinner, and therefore a fair target for disgust, ridicule and ostracism" (1996:62). Yet what both Twiggy, a working class girl, and Shrimpton, a middle upper class English woman, represented was a rejection of rigid class lines through assertion of a concept of femininity which identified thinness as an expression of freedom. In America as in Britain, this thin image became a symbol of youth. Movie stars such as Jane Fonda, Mary Tyler Moore and Sophia Loren began to slim down as "youth, or rather the struggle against ageing, became paired with thinness" (Orbach, 1986:73).

Some writers suggest that the Twiggy era spawned one dominant feminine body image (Poulton, 1996:69). This move towards a thinner ideal of attractiveness for women was reflected in various realms of popular culture including print media and television. During the 1970's images depicted in men's magazines such as Penthouse promoted a thinner, more tubular standard of beauty with a substantial decrease in bust size (Mazur, 1986:295). Playboy portrayed a taller, leaner female figure with bust and hip sizes considerably smaller than those presented in earlier editions of the publication. This decline in the representation of voluptuous shapely figures was also reflected within beauty pageants during this time, as models' weight and bust size decreased as they became taller and more slender proportionate to this change.

From the 1980's until present day, this preoccupation with weight, exercise and the thin body image has reached unrealistic heights. From Jane
Fonda, the fitness guru of the 80's, to the assortment of media personalities and fitness experts who have saturated the market promoting diets and workout videos, society has become inundated with an ideal body image that is for the majority of women difficult, if not impossible, to attain.

This discussion has pointed to the changing cultural images of the beautiful white woman over the past several decades as represented by standards of beauty within various media and art forms. Television and movie stars such as Jean Harlow in the 1930's, Marilyn Monroe in the 1950's and Kate Moss in the 1990's, have become identificatory role models for distinct standards of beauty within each changing decade. These images of attractiveness deemed ideal during specific time periods and characterized within various media outlets, from women's magazines, to television, to the big screen, were not images aimed at all woman alike. Firstly white women were the presumed audience for these ideal standards of attractiveness. They expressed a female form that was based upon whiteness as the norm against which to measure beauty ideals. More importantly, throughout the past several decades, the ideal image of feminine beauty within Western culture appears to have been class differentiated.

For example, in the 19th century, two distinct images of the female form exemplified this class division. The "steel engraving woman" admired for her beauty and social status was aimed at a very different audience than the "voluptuous woman" whose heavy bustline and sexual appeal was found to be a more fitting beauty icon for those representative of the lower echelons of society during this time. In the 1950's film stars such as Marilyn Monroe epitomized an ideal beauty image that portrayed an "earthy" sexuality that was, in my opinion, directed at the working class white woman. This image stood in sharp contrast to the more subdued and classic image of ideal beauty.
reflected during this time by such stars as Grace Kelly and Audrey Hepburn. This beauty standard was associated with and representative of aristocracy and high fashion. While not everyone epitomized these ideals, the changing images of feminine beauty became standards aimed at white women in different strata of society. Much like the idealized images promoted in Western society today by media personalities such as Kate Moss and Jane Fonda, they were icons of beauty which many women sought to attain.

As Mazur (1986) suggests "modern institutions of advertising, retailing, and entertainment now produce vivid notions of beauty that change from year to year, placing stress upon women to conform to the body image currently in vogue" (p.281). Given the importance of appearance within Western culture, particularly for women, it is my suggestion that these changing images of beauty symbolize something much deeper. "As a result, women are under more pressure than men to conform to an ideal of beauty because they quickly learn that their social opportunities are affected by their beauty, and a sense of beauty (or lack of it) becomes an important facet of a young woman's self-concept" (Mazur, 1986:282). In terms of employment opportunities for example, it has been suggested that there are considerable marketing benefits in employing attractive versus unattractive spokespeople (Kamins, 1990 as cited in Englisch, 1994:50). In her insightful book, Poulton (1996) outlines numerous examples of women in professions ranging from airlines to nursing who were discriminated against because their outward appearance, in particular their weight, failed to meet the socially acceptable standards set out by employers (pp.128-150). I would also speculate that interpersonal relations may be impacted by standards of beauty especially among women. It has been suggested that attractive people are better liked and assumed to be more sociable, independent and exciting.
(Brigham 1980, as cited in Englis, 1994). In my own experience, popularity with female peers and with the opposite sex, was mediated and impacted by beauty and attractiveness and, as mentioned in chapter one, my 'heterosexual appeal' was based upon a traditionally feminine notion of beauty expressed through certain ways to look and act. For women in particular, I feel that physical attractiveness matters a great deal. This discussion, in looking at media representations of the ideal feminine form, has shown that these images have played, and continue to play an influential role in shaping not only behaviour and attitudes surrounding standards of beauty and attractiveness, but have formed the basis upon which many women's self worth and identity are established.

2.8 Minority Women and the Mass Media

While eating disorders have been primarily viewed and subsequently addressed within the literature I have reviewed so far as a white phenomenon, I have also pointed to the increasing prevalence of various disturbed eating patterns among women of colour. It has been suggested by some writers that the cultural context of people of colour may provide protection from the development of eating pathology. "Protection is thought to be offered through appreciation of a physiologically healthy body-size, less emphasis on physical appearance, and stable family and social structures" (Root, 1990). Yet research has shown that instead of being protected from the conditions found to exist among white women who develop eating disorders, women of colour are seldom afforded shelter (Root, 1990). This raises an important issue. How do minority women fit into the dynamic interplay between the media's promotion of the thin ideal of attractiveness and the obsessive preoccupation with weight and thinness that appears to be
pervasive among white women?

In exploring the nature of this relationship, it is important to examine the mass media and consumerism in the promotion of identity. In her analysis of the influence of commodity culture on the lives of Afro-American women, Susan Willis suggests that while the initial introduction of women of colour into the fashion industry may have appeared to be an important step in the representation of cultural diversity within a crucial mass media outlet, this presentation has served to further perpetuate their position as the 'other' (Willis, 1991). She suggests that these images circumscribe ethnic and racial identity by portraying people of colour as exotic. Through the representation of models in ways which depict difference as culturally intriguing, both racial and ethnic stereotypes become increasingly at risk of exploitation. With the selective representation of images, the differences between white women and women of colour may be denied. While Afro-American women in particular are gradually becoming more represented in various forms of advertising and print media, most often the images are presented as “deracinated, deculturated black integers in a white equation” (Willis, 1991:112). Willis suggests that while various high fashion magazines portray minority women in a way which emphasizes their likeness to the dominant ideal of white beauty, this is especially apparent within the magazines specifically directed towards Afro-American women. Within the advertising medium in magazines like Essence and Ebony “... the format, models and slogans are black mirror-images of the same advertisements one sees month by month in the white magazines” (Willis, 1991:112).

Another way in which Willis suggests minority women are represented within the high fashion arena of advertising and marketing is through the look of “racial homogeneity” (1991:120). Through the
presentation of models whose facial features and skin tone denote no one particular race, the fashion industry presents an image of the ‘other’ which represents a combination of ethnicities; a neutral representation. This neutral look, which blurs the boundaries between the representation of women of colour and white women within the fashion industry and, which results in ‘the magical erasure of race’, “...denies the possibility of articulating cultural diversity precisely because it demonstrates that difference is only a matter of fashion. It is the new fall colours, the latest style, and the corporate logo or label, a discrete emblematic representation of the otherwise invisible white corporate godfather” (Willis, 1991:121).

The representation of race and ethnicity within the mass media is a complex issue and a detailed analysis is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, just as the aforementioned discussion points to the media’s promotion of ideal beauty as a white standard of attractiveness, so too is the ideal female body image. Therefore, while women of colour must negotiate their identity in the face of representations of a socially constructed white ideal of feminine beauty, it is important to look at the contexts within which images of minority women are presented. While my thesis attempts to explore how images of whiteness are constructed for women within magazines, I will also touch on the representation of race or ethnicity. I will discuss the presence of ‘others’ within the material, as well as the omission of racial diversity within a context where whiteness is taken as the norm.

In her insightful analysis of women of colour dealing with eating disorders, Thompson (1994) suggests that the stereotypes that seem to view women of colour as somehow untouched by the “cult of thinness” are similar to the ones that perpetuate the belief that the pursuit of the thin ideal is primarily an upper middle class concern. “The depiction of middle-class
women as vain and obsessive is intimately linked to the assumption that working-class women are the opposite," and are subsequently unconcerned about physical appearances, particularly the pursuit of a thin body image (Thompson, 1994:14). I have alluded to how earlier media representations participated in shaping such differentiated notions of class. For example in the 1950's, the slender, form fitting figures of Audrey Hepburn and Grace Kelly which represented classic elegance and sophistication stood in sharp contrast to the busty, voluptuous figures of movie stars like Marilyn Monroe which were aimed towards the working class white women of that time.

Similarly, Thompson (1994) asserts that the assumption that women of colour are protected from, and unconcerned about the pursuit of thinness appears also to be based on the long standing constructed dichotomies between white and black women as "good/bad, pretty/ugly, sexually uptight/sexually loose. These divisions feed into an erroneous notion of black women as somehow separate from a society in which beauty standards are an integral part of the socialization of all women" (Thompson, 1994:14). Yet as shown within the literature review, the prevalence of eating disorders among women of colour appears to suggest that this may not be the case.

I therefore speculate that the complex interplay of biological, familial and sociocultural factors that are considered in examining eating problems as a "white girl" phenomena, must also be analyzed when considering how women of colour develop disturbed eating patterns (Thompson, 1994:12). Acknowledging the impact of the mass media in presenting a culturally ideal standard of beauty unrealistic for many women, including women of colour is one strand in this discussion; one lens through which the relationship may be analyzed.

Root (1990) suggests that within certain social and vocational arenas,
there are few “successful” ethnic role models. As women of colour are increasingly gaining access to these opportunities, there may be a great deal of pressure on them to succeed and become identificatory figures within their cultural group. In an attempt to conform to the mainstream culture, many may feel pressured to look and act “perfect”. Perfect here, signifying a look that approximates whiteness or the appearance of white women. Yet in adopting the types of beauty standards promoted through various media, they must often conform to mainstream and white ideals of attractiveness. In so doing, the changes that are undertaken in an attempt to approximate these standards of beauty, may create conflict for many women of colour:

Physical appearance becomes a ticket for acceptance and even promotion; changes in hairstyles, dress, body-size, make-up, and even cosmetic surgery may be attempts to be accepted and keep the door open to opportunity. The double oppression that women of colour encounter - sexism and racism - can, for some individuals, provide the basis for the desperateness that underlies resorting to unhealthy eating and exercise practices. (Root,1990:529)

Moreover, it may appear that those within certain racial or ethnic groups may be faced with a double struggle in this process of negotiation and internalization of beauty standards. While they are subject to the ideals of mainstream society, the conflict that this creates may be further compounded if, as is often the case, their ethnic identity is devalued by the dominant culture. Looking at the problems faced by minority women as they gain access to increasing opportunities within the wider community does not however, address the experience of all women of colour. Rather it is an issue for those who have access to opportunities for advancement within economic and social arenas. Nonetheless, it does point to one way in which minority women may be impacted in the development of eating disorders within Western society. I feel that exploring the media’s preoccupation with thinness as a contributing factor within this complex relationship, may serve to
undermine the stereotypical assumptions surrounding notions of thinness that have excluded women of colour as likely candidates in developing disturbed eating patterns.

I believe that because the contexts within which eating disorders develop may be very different for people of colour, the complex interplay of elements at work within this process are of utmost importance. Within the literature I have reviewed for this thesis, one of the most important issues in examining the causal elements in the development of eating disorders, was the nature of family relations. The role of the family and the interpersonal relations within it must also be examined in looking at eating pathology among women of colour. As Thompson (1994) points out in her exploration of several women with eating disorders from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds, the attitudes and opinions of family members play an important role within this relationship. Almost all of the African American and Latina women she studied had been pressured by family members to be thin. This pressure came particularly from fathers who were overly concerned with outward appearance and looks. Thompson draws attention to the complexity of issues surrounding attitudes and feelings towards weight gain among the families of the women she studies. In many cases the women conveyed the notion that the pressure to be thin was related to a class dynamic where parents within lower class families desired to attain a middle or upper class standard of living. This “dual strain of changing class expectations”, combined with the experience of racism, served to promote thinness as a desired standard of beauty (Thompson, 1994:44). While this lens through which to examine the pressure towards thinness within these families is an important one, it is only one strand within this dynamic. In looking at family relations there may be additional elements at work which
serve as influential factors in the proliferation and development of eating pathology among women of colour. Thompson identified several women in her study who had experienced dysfunctional family relations, particularly among parents and siblings. Each of the women she examined showed very different types of family dynamics which were found to be linked in some way towards their disturbed eating patterns. It is therefore my suggestion that whether these factors are the same or different from those that impact upon white women, family dynamics play a crucial role within this process and it is important to examine this arena within future research.

Considering women of various racial and ethnic backgrounds who develop eating disorders, another area that has received attention is the issue of acculturation: "the process by which people modify their cultural practices as they adjust to a new culture" (Thompson, 1994:88). While the possible linkage between acculturation and the onset of eating pathology only pertains to minorities who are also immigrants, this line of inquiry is still an important consideration within the research. Root (1990) suggests that one of the primary problems for many non-white and working class or rural people who immigrate to a culture where white, middle class values are dominant, is that they often experience conflict in adapting to mainstream society. The desire to be accepted into the dominant system often pressures individuals to reject many aspects of their own culture, including food, cultural rituals and traditions. This may be especially true and further compounded by the perpetuation of a number of racial stereotypes in the mass media, particularly within television. The negative imagery promoted within this medium may reinforce the move away from, and denial of the culture and community of origin (Root, 1990). Yet in conforming to the dominant standards, eating disorders may develop as "a way to continue to ensure acceptance and cope
with identity issues” (Root, 1990:531). Through processes of acculturation, family relations may also be at risk of becoming destabilized. The nature of extended and nuclear family relationships may alter within a new culture, creating an intense level of dissatisfaction, isolation and loneliness for those for whom the change is greatest (Root, 1990). Given this, I would also speculate that conflicts surrounding gender expectations and disagreement among family members may occur creating conditions where eating pathology becomes a coping mechanism in dealing with these difficult issues.

Ultimately, the majority of women of colour do not develop eating disorders and not all are faced with conflict though the process of acculturation. There may be differences in the ways in which individuals negotiate an identity within the wider culture. This analysis is not intended to suggest that experiences are similar for all racial and ethnic groups. Rather, an attempt was made to draw attention to a range of issues that may be addressed in looking at the proliferation of eating disorders among minority women. This discussion has primarily centered around African American women. It is important to point out that the experiences of other racial groups and their relationship to eating pathology may be mediated by different factors. As Root (1990) suggests, social stereotypes around body image and weight depict African American women as naturally plump and Asian women as naturally thin. As a result of these generally held assertions surrounding body size, a thin Asian woman for example, may not be assessed for an eating disorder. Given the disparate cultural differences among various ethnic groups, it is therefore necessary for research to explore in more detail, the similarities and differences among these diverse groups. This section has taken a small step in addressing this complexity. The factors I have discussed may only be a small section of the influential forces that play a role within
this relationship. While the research has largely denied the existence of eating pathology among girls and women who are not white and middle or upper class, this discussion, combined with the extensive research by Root (1990) and others, has attempted to undermine these assertions (Thompson, 1994). Not only does there appear to be an increasing number of minority women with various disturbed eating patterns, but there are a number of elements surrounding the proliferation of this problem which are unique to minority women and women of colour and must be addressed as such within the literature.

2.9 Summary

The literature surrounding the factors at play in the development of eating disorders is extensive. Various areas from the familial to the sociocultural, have been addressed as contributing dimensions in the onset of disturbed eating patterns, particularly among young, white females. Given the complexity of this issue, it appears difficult, if not impossible, to pinpoint one specific cause of women's eating disorders. Instead the research points to the importance of addressing each distinct element as a single strand contributing to this complex problem within Western culture. While the literature I have examined within this analysis presents a number of important and highly compelling arguments in exploring the elements at work in the progression of eating disorders, there are also a number of issues within this research which need to be further enhanced by additional inquiry.

With respect to the sociocultural dimensions of this area of study, I feel that while the research examining trends in the media's promotion of certain standard of beauty over time contributes greatly to the overall analysis of this process, it is crucial to gain an understanding of the actual impact of media
images on the intended audience of these representations. This line of analysis would allow the researcher to uncover a great deal about women's negotiation of standards of beauty and the internalization or otherwise of these images. Women are not passive in the internalization of media imagery but rather play an active role in interpreting and subsequently negotiating an identity based upon or subverting or rejecting these representations.

My research for this thesis attempts to illustrate women's agency in two ways. Through the inclusion of my own relationship to and negotiation of media images in relation to my personal eating pathology, I explore the ways in which certain standards of attractiveness may be internalized in very different ways. My perception of thinness as an ideal construct changed dramatically at various stages of my eating disorder and in relationship to my constructed notion of femininity. Secondly, by exploring the complex process of, and structural linkage between advertising and editorial material within two very distinct types of women's magazines, my thesis draws attention to variations in the presentation of thinness as an ideal form within this outlet of popular culture. The literature I have reviewed within the aforementioned discussion fails to recognize thinness as a multidimensional concept: something that I will take issue with and address within this present analysis. I also feel that it is important to draw a distinction between various types of eating pathology and the varying factors that may contribute to the onset of each pattern. In my own experience, the influences surrounding my eating patterns changed as my eating behaviour moved through various stages. In particular, my thinking surrounding the media's presentation of certain standards of beauty altered my conception of thinness as an ideal female form.
Much of the literature I have reviewed is limited by the narrow focus on a specific sample group of subjects, particularly white female college or university students. Exploring the elements at play among other groups, for example among working class women and women of colour, may serve as an invaluable contribution to the literature. Assuming that all women are similarly impacted by various forces in the development of disturbed eating patterns, and addressing all women within a similar framework, fails to consider and account for the existence of distinct and influential differences in life experiences among women of colour or lower class groups. While the contradictions between paid employment and motherhood may serve as an influential force in contributing to the onset of certain disturbed eating patterns among some women, such conflict may not impact all women in the same way. Women of all class backgrounds and those within diverse racial and ethnic groups take part in various forms of wage labour. Different types of work create various levels of pressure. The research has addressed the ways in which middle and upper class women, in dealing with the strains of career and motherhood, often develop eating disorders as a coping mechanism. It is my suggestion that working class women or women of colour who develop eating pathology have very different pressures. It is important for future studies to delve into this area of inquiry to gain a more complete understanding of the tensions between the role of motherhood and wifehood and the balancing of responsibilities.

Another important area of inquiry may be to focus considerably more attention on the incidence of eating disorders among males. While it has been shown that their number may be small, future research exploring the causal elements impacting upon men who experience this problem may serve as an invaluable contribution to the larger picture. In particular, it is
important for research to examine the role if any, of the media, in promoting certain male body ideals. It may also be beneficial to explore the incidence of sexual trauma, the types of family interactional patterns and the gender role expectations among males who experience some level of pathological eating along the vast continuum of eating disorders.

Lastly, the conceptualization of certain constructs within the studies as well as the measures used in gathering together the information may prove to be a problematic issue within the research. The use of self reports in collecting data within much of the literature I have reviewed, may bring about the important question of reliability. This is particularly important given the precarious nature of much of the analysis surrounding incidence of sexual trauma or psychological illness among those who develop disturbed eating patterns. One of the most relevant issues is the underestimation of these reporting figures due to stigma associated with the onset of these types of problems. Moreover, it has also been shown that measures of various features within the research such as sex roles or masculinity and femininity, may often fail to encompass the range of elements embodied within these socially constructed notions. While it must be recognized that definitive answers may not be attainable through any research method, combining various types of inquiry may contribute to a more complete understanding of the research.

Ultimately, eating disorders and the interplay of elements surrounding their development are complex. In order to gain an in-depth understanding of this apparently expanding problem within Western society, it is important to explore a range of contributing factors and how they interact. While familial, sociocultural and psychological factors may play a crucial role in the proliferation of eating disorders, neither one alone can adequately explain
their development. My thesis is ultimately one small contribution to this investigation in which I attempt to address one of several issues that I feel deserve attention. I will now turn to an analysis of the construction of images of thinness in two types of women's magazines. Through this analysis I seek to show that notions of thinness must be seen as complex and multidimensional.
CHAPTER THREE.

ANALYSIS

3.1 Media Images of Thinness

Idealized standards of beauty are promoted within various mass media vehicles of popular culture. From television to movies, to print media, women are bombarded with images of young, thin, shapeless girls who epitomize what has become the ideal female body image within modern North American society. On the runways and in the fashion shows of infamous designers such as Lagerfeld, Klein and Karan, thinness is represented by supermodels as a symbol of status, beauty and success. Yet while the fashion industry may be the ultimate venue for the presentation of these standards of beauty, these images have become widely distributed throughout a diversity of mass media outlets.

Female television and movie stars are becoming thinner and thinner. Many can be found endorsing any one of the countless diet and weight loss gimmicks and quick fix solutions that attempt to convince women of the desirability and attainability of an exceptionally thin, female form. Through a multi million dollar diet and weight loss industry, the pursuit of and preoccupation with slenderness has become a national pastime for thousands of women and young girls within Western society. There are an endless and ever growing array of diet books and articles, fitness centres and weight loss programs which promote the message that looking good and reaching a desirable standard of attractiveness is attainable by anyone who works long and hard enough.

While extolling thinness as a virtue and reinforcing a negative
portrayal of fat, the media attempts to convince women that they have the ability to emulate those who, in reality, represent an image far removed from their own body size and shape. We are seldom enlightened by the crucial role played by biology in setting the limitations of our bodies but instead become instilled with the notion that self discipline and control are the key elements in this pursuit of thinness. The messages which offer thinness as the key to happiness and success, and which present standards of beauty epitomizing this ideal, resound throughout Western popular culture. The focus of the analysis in this chapter is on one medium which plays a crucial and highly influential role in expressing these ideals: women's magazines.

3.2 Selection Process

Ferguson argues that women's magazines are among the most significant, yet least studied social institutions of our time (Ferguson, 1983:1).

Alongside other social institutions such as the family, the school, the church and other media, they contribute to the wider cultural processes which define the position of women in a given society at a given point in time. In this exchange with the wider social structure, with processes of social change and social continuity, these journals help to shape both a women's view of herself, and society's view of her. (Ferguson, 1983:1)

There is a vast array of publications within this category of media and an in-depth analysis of the range of material is beyond the scope of this thesis. Rather, I chose from a limited number of publications as representative of two distinct categories of women's magazines, fashion and fitness. I looked at three publications within each of these categories. Within fashion, I analyzed Elle (American edition), Harper's Bazaar, and Vogue (American edition), while the category of fitness was represented by Shape, Fit and Fitness.

I chose to explore the images of women within magazines rather than alternative media outlets such as television or advertising billboards for a
number of reasons. My own interest in this realm as a source of personal enjoyment was the starting point for this exploration. Moreover, given my experience with eating disorders and the important role that I believe, media imagery played in my life, I felt that I needed to delve deeper into what I viewed to be a complex yet highly influential relationship between the media and the development of behaviour along the continuum of eating disorders. More than any other media outlet, magazines have had the most powerful influence in my own experience. Television and movies were, and continue to be, an important part of my socialization. They promoted many of the same images of beauty and perfection that I will focus on throughout this analysis. However, magazines captured my attention and my consumption of this medium has played a crucial role in shaping my personal views around ideal images of beauty and the body.

The scope of this type of media outlet in reaching a wide and diverse audience was also a primary motivating factor in my selection choice. The texts chosen for this analysis are accessible within a number of outlets, from newsstands to supermarket shelves to public libraries. The circulation of each magazine is also exceptionally high, varying from over one million for Vogue, to seven hundred and fifty thousand for Fitness (Ulrich's International Periodical Directory, 1997). These numbers reinforced to me that the magazines I chose were 'out there' and available to a wide variety of women. Therefore, they represent a highly popular range of media material. The popularity and wide distribution of the magazines I selected, combined with the "pass on readership" of these types of publications, placed the medium of women's magazines as an ideal area of study for this particular research (McCracken, 1993:2).

Magazines play a crucial role within Western society today. In her
highly influential book, *Forever Feminine: Women’s Magazines and the Cult of Femininity*, Marjorie Ferguson suggests that women’s magazines comprise a social institution which serves to foster and maintain a cult of femininity. “In promoting a cult of femininity these journals are not merely reflecting the female role in society; they are also supplying one source of definitions of, and socialisation into, that role” (Ferguson, 1983:184). I believe that the images contained within women’s magazines contribute to this socially constructed notion by presenting women with various ways to look and act. The primary goal of my thesis was to draw attention to the various strategies of the advertising and editorial material within magazines, in presenting variations in ideal standards of beauty.

In advancing this line of analysis, I wanted to illustrate, through my own personal negotiation of these beauty ideals in relation to my eating patterns, that these images represented different constructed notions of femininity. From the passive, willowy thin images of the women in *Vogue*, to the super toned thin bodies within *Shape*, these magazines would allow me to draw attention to the ways in which different notions of femininity continued to be promoted through these images of thinness, yet in very different ways. This media outlet was chosen because it allowed me to explore this issue in detail. With respect to both the time restraint and financial limitations within which I was forced to work, magazines were also one of the most accessible outlets to me in relation to alternative media vehicles. Given the population most at risk in developing disturbed eating patterns, I felt that the women’s magazines chosen for this examination were most suitably aimed at this target group.

Among the specific publications within each category of fashion and fitness, there were countless numbers to choose from. Within the realm of
fitness, there is a huge selection of such publications, from *Women's Sports Fitness* to *Living Fit*, to those which focus on particular sports and fitness related activities including swimming, cycling and running. I feel that the fitness magazines I selected reflect a more general focus on fitness and health in that they explore several diverse issues, such as weight training, diet and nutrition. With covers featuring such title headings as, "Yoga for Hard, Tight Thighs," "55 Tactics to Burn Fat, Boost Energy & Stay Motivated," and "Eat To Be Lean", these magazines most suitably represent the area of fitness that I wish to examine (*Fit*, May:1997; *Shape*, May:1997; *Fitness*, June:1997). While they may not be representative of all such types of publications and, while there may be others which also fall within this designation, the focus for the present study will lie primarily within these issues.

With respect to the realm of fashion, there are also several different titles which fall into the category of women's fashion publications. My decision to select *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar* and *Elle* as a suitable basis for my analysis was made for a number of reasons. The circulation of each publication, in reaching an audience in excess of half a million, reinforced their popularity among a vast number of women. Moreover, they epitomized for me, “fashion focused” magazines, as illustrated throughout the pages of each issue. Further reinforcing their suitability for the purpose of this study, a representative at *Vogue*, when asked about the magazines intended audience, responded that *Vogue* is primarily aimed at the woman for whom “style is a way of life”. Directing the same question at a *Harper's Bazaar* representative, the woman replied that their publication was directed towards the “fashion enthusiast”. While these fashion magazines, like the fitness publications I chose, may not be representative of all titles within this realm, they were chosen for the purpose of this analysis, to reflect what I feel to be a strong
fashion theme.

After choosing the publications to form the basis of my exploration, the next step was to decide how to select images that would allow me to analyze the expression of thinness as an ideal within this media outlet. It was impossible to use every single image contained within the vast array of material. In determining the criteria used to select the images, it was necessary to consider the purpose of my research. Ultimately, given the relatively small sample of material upon which my exploration was based, and given the limited scope of my thesis, my intention was not to draw sweeping conclusions from the results of my study. Rather, I set out to explore and open up an alternative line of inquiry for such research. I wanted to draw attention to some important areas of study that I felt deserved consideration. Given this, I made the decision to select images that I felt demonstrated variations within the representation of thinness as an ideal image within this media outlet. Thus the images I chose to analyze lent support to my general claims.

This method of "purposive" sampling technique has created a great deal of controversy in sociology, most notably in Erving Goffman's groundbreaking research examining gender roles and stereotyping within the visual imagery of magazine advertising (Goffman, 1976). In that study, Goffman, instead of randomly selecting advertisements, drew a deliberate sample of images that were seen to be representative of his stated theme surrounding gender difference. Through this sampling strategy he attempted to gain a more complete understanding of the role played by gender within social interactions. It was not his intention to suggest generalizations surrounding greater numbers of visual images. Similarly, my own intention was to explore the characterization of thinness within two very distinct categories of
women's magazines, and within these categories, to look at specific titles within the realm of fashion and fitness. I was more interested in how these representations operate within different types of magazines than in drawing general conclusions for all magazines. Given the purpose of my research, I felt that this non-random sampling technique was an appropriate and sufficient method of selection.

Due to the limited resources available in conducting my research, an extensive longitudinal examination was not possible. For the purpose of this study, I set out to examine the same monthly issues of all six magazines within a two year time frame. I chose 1996 and 1997 as an accessible realm of study and randomly selected May and June issues of both years as the months upon which to base my analysis.

However, as I began collecting the data, I was immediately faced with a number of difficulties. I discovered that while past issues of numerous fashion publications were accessible within both public libraries, as well as second hand book stores, the fitness magazines were extremely difficult to obtain. I was able to locate a limited selection of Shape issues within the area of Consumer Health in a handful of public libraries within and around the city, yet both Fit and Fitness were unavailable to me within these outlets. Faced with such unexpected circumstances in obtaining the information needed for my intended inquiry, I was forced to use an alternative process of selection. My initial decision to explore the world of magazines arose from my own interest in this arena in relation to my personal relationship to eating pathology. Given my keen interest in the realm of fitness and fashion through my pursuit of thinness, I had access to a number of both recent and back dated issues of several publications, particularly those within the area of fitness. While my selection choice was therefore constrained by the
availability within my personal collection of material, I was able to gather
together an assortment of issues which reflected consistency within the
desired time frame. My research was subsequently based upon September and
October 1996 issues, and May and June 1997 issues of all six publications.

While I became frustrated by the difficulties I faced gaining access to the
specific publications I had originally intended to use within my analysis, this
problem of accessibility drew attention to a number of interesting issues.
While browsing around several second hand book stores in search of back
issues, I noticed that there was an endless supply of fashion magazines,
particularly well known publications such as *Vogue, Harper's Bazaar, Elle* and
*Cosmopolitan*, dating back as far as the 1970's. Similarly, several public
libraries housed both recent and past issues of these publications, again dating
back several decades. It is important to acknowledge that the fashion
publications chosen for this particular analysis have all been published
considerably longer than the fitness magazines. For example, while *Harper's
Bazaar* has been published for over one hundred years, the fitness magazines
I analyzed have all been on the market for less than twenty years. While this
may partly account for the distinct difference in availability, this extreme
divergence between accessibility of fashion versus fitness magazines suggests
an important point.

One of the primary goals of this thesis is to illustrate, by tracing the
complex linkage between advertising and editorial material, the promotion of
certain body images as ideal standards of attractiveness within distinct
categories of women's magazines. It is my assertion that women are afforded
some room for agency and control in attaining the standards of beauty
expressed within the advertisement and editorial content of fitness
publications. This appears to suggest that readers are more likely to actively
use and adhere to the instructional advice and editorial material within fitness publications. These magazines, rather than being given up to second hand book stores, are more likely to be collected (as were mine), for personal use over time. The standards of beauty promoted within these publications are presented in a way which allows the readers to become engaged in the pursuit of the thin body image, further reinforcing the likelihood that fitness magazines may be used by the reader in the active process of body manipulation and control.

Fashion magazines, on the other hand, were readily available within various libraries and bookstores. Moreover, while browsing through stores throughout the city, I also came across a number of extremely old issues of various fashion magazines, particularly Vogue and Harper’s Bazaar, which had been packaged and preserved in a way which seemed to suggest that they had gained considerable value over time. They appeared to embody icons or representations reflective of a distinct era of time. While fitness magazines may convince the reader to gain control in achieving desired standards of beauty, fashion magazines present these beauty ideals as appropriate for or representative of a given time period. As the socially constructed conception of beauty changes over time, new images replace the old ideals.

In my analysis I first attempt to illustrate the ways in which thinness as an ideal body construct is promoted within fashion magazines, through the various strategies and links between fashion editorial content and advertising. Just as fashion and style change with the passing of each decade, the feminine form as an ideal similarly undergoes transition from one decade to the next. Fashion magazines may therefore serve as a means through which certain images become encoded and representative of a given time frame, succeeded only by standards of beauty more reflective of a subsequent
era. This may be one explanation for why back issues of fashion magazines are more readily accessible for public consumption. The images within them display fashion and current trends at a particular point in time and in so doing, present a standard of beauty that readers may strive to attain. Yet just as quickly as one ideal conception of beauty appears, for example the thin, shapeless form of Twiggy in the 1960's, another soon takes its place as shown by the return to thinness as a socially constructed cultural ideal of attractiveness epitomized in the 1990's by countless runway models and media celebrities.

Staying on top of the ever changing and fast paced world of fashion brings about the need to adhere to the current trends in the ever changing ideal body image represented within various media vehicles of popular culture. I feel that my limited access to certain categories of women's magazines and the unlimited availability of others, were therefore determined by the very different roles and uses of fashion and fitness magazines for women, myself included, within North American society. While fitness magazines may be used actively in pursuing thinness as an ideal construct, fashion magazines serve a more passive role in which the imagery within them serves as a symbol or expression of beauty within a specific frame of reference.

3.3 Advertising and the Promotion of Ideal Beauty

According to Englis et al. (1994), fashion magazines are widely read and have a long history. They provide instruction for becoming more beautiful. They are aimed at specific taste cultures and audiences go through them for tips and ideal images of beauty which they use as standards against which to measure and evaluate themselves. "Thus, fashion magazines are a potent
means of socializing young consumers about beauty and fashion and for advertising beauty and fashion related products” (Englis, 1994:53). Yet these ideals of beauty, particularly those around body shape and size promoted within various fashion magazines, are not produced in a vacuum.

Beauty ideals for women within North America, as shown in chapter two, have undergone considerable transformation over the past fifty years from the voluptuous Gibson Girls in 1930's to the 1990's model of beauty superwaif Kate Moss. The fluidity of these norms of body image suggest that they are cultural constructions based upon common socialization experiences. In particular it has been suggested that various mass media vehicles of popular culture play a crucial role in promoting these standards of attractiveness (Englis et al, 1994).

One of the primary ways in which these standards of beauty become represented and encoded within media outlets is through advertising and the process of consumerism. “Consumers are constantly on the prowl to acquire the latest products and services that will help them attain this elusive quality. To capitalise on this desire, marketers compete fiercely to position their products and to design mass media communications so as to embody current ideals of beauty” (Englis et al, 1994:49). This promotion of consumer activity through advertising is accomplished in a number of ways.

The front cover is one of the most important advertisements within fashion magazines serving to entice the reader to delve further into the publication by providing a glimpse of what is to follow. Moreover, “the covers that use the photo of a glamorous women to represent physical perfection rely on readers' personal sense of inferiority, especially about their physical appearance” and, in promoting feelings of insecurity, women are influenced by the covert and overt advertisements inside the magazine.
Covert advertisements or promotions disguised as editorial material or hidden in some other form, so that they appear to be non-advertising, help to situate the reader favourably towards the actual advertisements (McCracken, 1993:39). The editorial material may serve to complement or promote an advertised product in a number of ways. Through its placement to the ad or editorial structure and tie in, a continuum is formed between the editorial content and advertisements. “Many of the patterns at work in advertising appear as well in the editorial pages” (McCracken, 1993:135).

Purchased or overt advertisements are more direct forms of address which earn revenue for the publication yet serve the same purpose as covert advertisements. Through the promotion of certain products they attempt to “create fancied needs and exaggerated self-consciousness in the primarily female audience of these publications” (McCracken, 1993:67). This range of advertising techniques represent nearly 90 percent of the pages of women's fashion magazines and each category shapes the cultural attributes of a particular publication (McCracken, 1993: 64).

Through their primary messages, that women should buy certain products and services, advertisements often promote a standard image that may induce insecurities among women who aspire to represent this ideal. “We learn to identify ourselves according to the way we are addressed. . . . In the case of advertisements, if our self-concept does not already correspond to the form in which we are addressed, the ad encourages us to learn to see ourselves in this way” (McCracken, 1993:102-104). One of the messages of advertising is that the limitations of biology can be overridden. The consumption of products and services promotes the attainability of an ideal body image or standard of attractiveness that is in reality unrealistic for the
majority of women.

The process by which advertising presents or communicates to the audience a particular ‘look’ or impression is a complex one. Within this dynamic, decision-makers in the realm of advertising, including fashion and beauty editors and film directors, attempt to convey a set of meanings to the audience and to shape the image of a particular product well before the consumer is given the opportunity to “cast a vote” (Englis et al, 1994). These media gatekeepers, in conveying a particular look and image based upon their own decision-making, belief system, and in many cases their personal stereotypes, subsequently define and sanction ideals of beauty which become ingrained as cultural representations of beauty within various media outlets (Englis et al, 1994). Women’s magazine editors, through their content choices, act as gatekeepers of the female world. “It is they who decide which beliefs and practices will be included in, or excluded from, the message. It is they who decide what will be inscribed upon, or struck off, the feminine agenda” (Ferguson, 1983:148).

While the decision-making process of those operating within this realm appears highly subjective, it may in fact be guided by the deeper associations and common sense conceptions of beauty types and ideals within our culture. It has been suggested that although “the gatekeepers involved in this selection process may not necessarily be aware of the common threads of symbolism each uses to weave his or her social tapestry, their choices reverberate throughout popular culture” (Englis et al, 1994:52).

Subsequently, the images promoted through advertisements and editorial material within the mass media may be representative of widely held cultural assumptions surrounding body image and beauty ideals. The role of these media gatekeepers serves to reinforce the assertion that while
"the media may not directly influence what the public thinks, but it can have a profound effect on what the public thinks about" (emphasis added) (Poulton, 1996:67).

McCracken argues that, "as advertising vehicles, women's magazines are among the most desirable of publications. They are aimed at the sector of the population traditionally most responsible for purchases. . . . The strength of the women's magazine category rests principally on the crucial role of women in the consumption process and on the ability of this magazine group to adapt, albeit superficially, to social change" (1993:82). In looking at women's fashion magazines in particular, the distinct looks or impressions presented within the advertising arena becomes translated into icons of beauty against which individuals, particularly women evaluate themselves (Englis et al, 1994). However, these beauty standards also form the basis upon which patterns of consumption are developed as women strive to emulate and approximate these ideals. Women's magazines are both a business enterprise and cultural texts and advertising plays a crucial role in shaping the cultural content of these publications (McCracken, 1993:3). My thesis examines two different categories of women's magazines in an attempt to look at how advertising and editorial material, in promoting the consumption of products and services, serves to present variations in the current cultural ideal of beauty.

In looking at the imagery within women's magazines, McCracken examines the crucial role of this cultural form in presenting "... value-laden semiotic systems to immense numbers of women" (McCracken, 1993:1). Through an examination of this structure at work within and between various realms of advertising and editorial features in a number of publications, from fashion and beauty to special interest issues, she suggests
that women's magazines use similar textual techniques and strategies to conflate commodities and desire and achieve significant circulation and profits (McCracken, 1993). One of the most important aspects of her work in relation to the purpose of this study, is her focus on a variety of women's magazines. She explores the interconnectedness between advertising and editorial material within very different publications, and in so doing draws attention to the similarities presented within the message of each publication. She suggests that despite variations in their negotiation and interpretation, there is structural continuity within the textual strategies of women's magazines. The primary aim is to create and promote the process of consumption.

3.4 Magazine Analysis

Women's magazines are [also] pervasive in the extent to which they act as agents of socialisation, and the remarkable degree to which they deal in and promulgate values and attitudes.... Add to this the power of the advertising which is directed at women through their pages and the conclusion follows: here is a very potent formula indeed for steering female attitudes, behaviour and buying along a particular path of femininity, and a particular female world view of the desirable, the possible and the purchasable. (Ferguson, 1983:2)

Ferguson argues that, "as a social institution, women's magazines play a part in shaping the characteristics of femininity, because they themselves are part of, and contribute to, the culture of society as a whole" (Ferguson, 1983:6). Magazines promote certain types of beauty as more highly valued than others. In particular, research has shown that thinness appears to be the current ideal standard of attractiveness presented within various media outlets including and especially women's magazines (Morris et al, 1989; Garner et al, 1980; Poulton, 1996; Wiseman et al, 1992; Silverstein et al, 1986). "Fashion magazines represent a traditional print medium that is directly concerned with beauty and which is an important media vehicle for
advertisers who seek to link their products to a particular beauty ideal” (Englis et al,1994:53). Yet within this arena of popular culture, there may be a number of ways in which this conception of beauty is presented. My assertions surrounding the existence of variations in the characterization of beauty ideals are based upon both the research for this thesis and my own internalization of media imagery. Through the course of my personal eating pathology, my conception of thinness as an idealized construct changed as my behaviour altered along the continuum of eating pathology over a ten year period. In particular, thinness became a symbol or representation of my constructed notion of femininity. While different types of women’s magazines may be aimed at specific subsets of the population, they are constructed in a way which promotes certain notions or ideals of beauty over others. In particular, while the expression of beauty images is based upon a single notion or thin ideal, different types of magazines may offer variations in this representation. This chapter illustrates this focus through an exploration of the process of advertising and editorial linkage within a selection of women’s magazines.

While “readers of women’s magazines are presented with examples of superwomen, an endless procession of successful, beautiful and inspirational role models to envy or emulate”, the realm of advertising plays a crucial role in the nature of this presentation (Ferguson,1983:9). Through a diversity of techniques, advertising may serve to cultivate variations in the thin beauty image. In the next section I will explore the linkage between advertising and editorials in promoting idealized standards of beauty within women’s fashion and fitness magazines.
3.4.1 Fashion - Vogue, Harper's Bazaar, Elle

McCracken (1993) suggests that, “from Young Miss to Vogue, the beauty and fashion publications encourage one to enjoy certain transgressive and utopian pleasures, each magazine developing its own specific configuration of both forbidden and acceptable arenas of enjoyment. Simultaneously, however, each publication finds a means of containing these pleasures, harnessing them to consumerism” (McCracken, 1993:136). One of the most apparent features in the fashion magazines chosen for this particular analysis was the large number of overt advertisements. As I will show in the next section, the type and presentation of advertisements in fitness magazines are quite different. The fashion magazines I analyzed were replete with paid advertisements featuring products such as perfumes, cosmetics and expensive designer clothing. While I found there to be less editorial content, the material that was included did not appear to be directly linked to the paid advertisements. Instead, the structure of the publication introduced a socially desired standard of attractiveness through a culture of fashion and a continuity between fashion layouts and advertising.

Within several women’s magazines the primary editorial focus is fashion. In many fashion magazines the emphasis on current trends and style begins on the cover and extends into the body of the publication through a lengthier column (McCracken, 1993). Both the advertisements and fashion based editorials, often feature expensive designer clothing unaffordable for the majority of readers and as a result, “utopian elements” are at work in many fashion features. “Readers can momentarily enjoy the opulent garment, its prestigious name and price, and the glamorous model who wears it, even while they know it is out of reach” (McCracken, 1993:164).
Thin, waif-like models fill the pages of fashion magazines. They flaunt unaffordable designer clothing and create a high cultural appeal, offering women an ideal identity by implying, “if you want to be this, you must dress like this” (McCracken, 1993:169). Yet given the idealized images of thinness represented within the pages of these high culture fashion magazines, it may more aptly be implied, “if you want this, you must look like this” or, “if you want this, you must be as thin as this”. In offering women an idealistic vision of themselves, these images which link affluence, success and beauty, direct readers to the marketplace (McCracken, 1993:169).

My initial reading of the fashion magazines began by flipping through each publication in an effort to get a general feel for the types of images or notions that each conveyed to the reader. Immediately I was struck by the similarity of imagery that I found in my selection of Vogue, Elle and Harper’s Bazaar. It is impossible to discuss in detail or generalize about all the ways in which thinness as an idealized standard of beauty was expressed within these publications. However, in my personal reading of the imagery several common themes seemed to prevail and these will form the basis of my analysis.

I explored the way in which the thin body image was expressed within the structural content of the magazines through advertising, editorials and the linkage between the two. One of the most interesting ways in which this ideal was endorsed within these high fashion publications was through the expression of childlike innocence. In the October 1996 issue of Elle (p.44), a frail looking young woman, with a passive motionless expression, looks blankly into the camera in an advertisement for Miu Miu clothing. Her hair is tied back, her make-up is pale and natural, and she wears a dark coloured double breasted coat, ribbed tights and buckled shoes. While the designer label...
may represent status and high fashion, the clothing she displays appears to be more reminiscent of a private girls' school uniform than a fashion trend. Moreover, it is apparent that underneath the coat, her shapeless, curveless body resembles that of a young girl rather than a mature woman. While thinness here promotes youth and an expression of childlike innocence, it also depicts issues of social class and wealth. She has the 'look' of a young girl, yet stands adorned in fashions that may be less than affordable for many of those whom she represents. Her calm expression as she looks into the camera reflects an awkward child in need of protection.

A similar image is conveyed in the May issue of Vogue (p.160). Here an advertisement for Alberta Ferretti depicts three gaunt young women coyly addressing the camera with a look of naivete. Through their willowy dresses and wispy hair they take on a carefree appearance, a look which is further promoted by their childlike mannerisms and hand gestures, including self touching and canting postures: gestures which Goffman suggests may be read as expressions of subordination and submissiveness within magazine advertising (Goffman, 1976). The dresses are dainty and sheer and the shapeless breastless figures of the models are clearly visible as they offer themselves like little girls showing off brand new dresses for the first time. Femininity is introduced by these images as passive, innocent frailty. Through the timid expressions and look of naivete that excudes from these representations, the models appear 'girlish' and coy.

The fashion magazines I analyzed were replete with images where thinness was projected in this way as frail and childlike. However, an alternative portrayal stood out and prevailed throughout this material. It was an image where thinness was suggestive of a classic elegance and high status appeal. In the May 1997 issue of Harper's Bazaar (p.65), an advertisement
features the long, sleek lines of the female form through the representation of a body fitting Gucci gown. While the thin body image is established as a pallet upon which to display this designer line, thinness within this context embodies a distinctly different notion of femininity. The woman in the picture is looking away from the camera and with her expressionless gesture, imports a feeling of distance and coolness. Her gaze away from the camera is suggestive and beckons attention. The attention she seeks may be directed towards the fantasy and imagination of the female reader who is seduced by the expensive designer clothing and the promises that it holds. At the same time it is a look that radiates sexual enticement perhaps aimed at the male gaze. Through the sleek, smooth lines of her body she alludes to cultured luxury, the attainability of which is expressed through the fashions she displays. Here thinness is depicted as the look of feminine elegance through bourgeoise or high status appeal.

In the May 1997 issue of *Vogue*, (pp.291-301), this look is epitomized again in a fashion editorial. Here, a series of images introduce dramatic and exotic fashions with captions like, “slits emphasize movement,” and “red a runway favourite, guarantees plenty of attention” and, “on the short list from summer: a skirt cut to there, a sleek top, and dangerously sexy shoes”. The thin sleek lines of the shapeless silhouette expressed by the model, display these alluring designs to the reader as images of perfection. The model gazes away from the camera lens, and in so doing depicts a cool and passive image of style and femininity reinforced by the expensive clothing she adorns. This notion is similarly reflected in an advertisement for Nicole Miller fashions in the October 1996 issue of *Vogue* (p.63). The exceptionaly thin model displays a breathtaking evening dress with a look that exudes confidence and experience. Her make-up and hair are dramatic and she pouts her sensual red
lips while gazing seductively at the camera lens. The model depicts an image that screams out to the female reader 'look at me', while at the same time urging male attention through sexual enticement. Her elegance and sophistication is expressed through the effortless and casual way that she offers the reader, through the clothing she adorns and her flawless form, an ideal standard of beauty and a 'look' that can ultimately be bought.

I found several examples of imagery of the thin body that expressed, on the one hand femininity as childlike innocence, and on the other as maturity, wealth and sophistication. However, more importantly there appeared to be a blurring of boundaries within these representations. The interplay and tension of these two elements created contradictions in the socially constructed notion of femininity. For example, in the May 1997 issue of Vogue (p.73), a young, exceptionally thin model with perfectly coiffed hair and painted nails and face is presented in an advertisement for Giorgio Armani. She is wearing a sheer, floral dress and looking coyly away from the camera. The product being advertised depicts expensive clothing and high status and, through her thinness and passive representation she displays the look of cultured feminine appeal. However, at the same time, she appears childlike and reserved. Through her stance she seems almost fearful and in need of protection. In the same issue (p.118), a young, thin model in an advertisement for Versace, is shown again bashfully looking away from the camera as she stands shyly in a white silky dress. She excudes opulence and femininity yet through her thin body image which serves as a canvass upon which this expensive designer fashion is displayed, she appears docile and unassertive. Through her pale, natural looking make-up she is portrayed in a simple and effortless manner. Yet to the reader she appears to endorse an image of a mature sophisticated woman. She displays an exquisite designer
dress which she does with a look of sexual enticement and wanting which, it may be suggested, is directed towards the focus of male attention. In both the Versace and the Armani advertisements, the models convey a seemingly effortless and casual look. The style and sophisticated appeal that exudes from these images comes from the leisurely way in which this 'look' is maintained. The passive, laid back attitude and uncomplicated way of being represents a life of leisure and one which may ultimately be purchased.

An important aspect of this imagery is that there appears to be an interplay of two elements at work in creating the dynamic. On the one hand, the models convey the feeling of passivity and elegance through the clothing and the ease with which this look is depicted. These women exhibit wealth and status as a purchasable 'look' and through this they promote a world of fantasy and imagination for the female reader. At the same time, they are sultry and alluring and they appear wanting perhaps, as objects of desire for the male gaze. However, the bashful coy glances at the camera and the thin shapeless form of the models create a timid innocence that overlaps with this coolness. The women are focused away from, or look shyly into the camera and offer a feeling that depicts them in need of protection. The thinness of the models is linked to a expression of femininity which slides between on the one hand, simple innocence and on the other, maturity and elegance.

This tension is similarly shown in the June 1997 issue of Elle (pp. 204-209). Here a fashion spread features a forlorn looking young woman, childishly pouting as she gazes away from the camera. She is wearing an elegant designer label which in one frame is described by the statement, "these pieces are chic without being showy, able to integrate - yet still stand out in any woman's wardrobe" (italics added). Her sultry pose presents her in
a way where she appears wanting of attention. She has the sexual appeal and allure of a mature, sophisticated woman. Yet the young woman who models these designer fashions has the look of a naive, innocent child. This childish image is further reinforced by her absence of womanly qualities and her shapeless, breastless figure. She has the body image reflective of a child, though the clothing she wears, while deemed as 'affordable' fashion within the article, appears to be neither desirable nor affordable for the age group she represents. The tension created within this image comes from the contradictions expressed through an image of thinness that is characterized by two very different conceptions of a socially constructed notion of femininity.

Another example that expresses a similar contradiction appears in the June 1997 issue of Elle (p.214). Here, a fashion layout features a young, waif thin model displaying a range of designer clothing by Gucci. The same young girl can be seen on the cover of the publication in which her skeletal-like frame models a tight fitting sweater and pants. She has a shapeless body and her gaunt expressionless face depicts a look of starvation. Inside, the fashion article establishes her in some photographs as a passive, frail young woman with a coy look of naivety, yet in others she stares starkly at the camera as she models the elegance of Gucci. Shortly after seeing this image, I became aware that she is only eighteen years of age. After looking at the impression again, it became clear that one of the primary issues surrounding this representation are the contradictions contained within it. On the one hand, thinness as a sign of youth is reflected by the presence of the model herself who is still a child. Yet at the same time she is depicting a 'look' or culture through these expensive designer fashions that denotes elegance and feminine appeal for what would appear to be the sophisticated elite reader of Vogue. I would speculate that through these representations thinness is offered as a symbol
not only of status and wealth, but of youth. Within the fashion culture, designer clothing is seldom tailored for, nor modelled by, those who fail to reflect this young, thin, shapeless form. This eighteen year old young woman epitomizes a beauty standard that may be both unrealistic and unattainable for the majority of women regardless of age, yet the fashion magazines I analyzed for this study were replete with such images.

In the June 1997 issue of Harper's Bazaar (pp.103-116), contradictions in the depiction of thinness in conveying a notion of femininity are further illustrated in a fashion layout featuring the super model Kate Moss. This feature, like many of the fashion articles, is laid out like a story in which this model who has become renowned for her frail, skeletal-like figure, displays various fashions by Calvin Klein, Emanuel Ungaro and Michael Kors. In many ways she conveys the look of a young inexperienced girl, devoid of the curves or shapeliness of womanhood and with an expressionless, passive gaze. At the same time, through the image expressed by the designer clothing she wears and her sultry stare into the camera, her thin body is elegant and suggests a look of feminine appeal. She is portrayed as an alluring woman who seeks attention, perhaps male attention. In offering this image to the reader she stands for high fashion and elegance. Yet she also has a childlike, bashful innocence that conveys a very different notion of femininity. There are a blurring of boundaries between femininity as elegant and cultured while at the same time, timid and frail and her look sways back and forth between the two notions. In the October 1996 issue of Vogue (pp.134-139), Kate Moss is again shown this time within an advertisement for Versace clothing. With a similar combination of sultry feminine appeal and naivete, she models an expensive designer line of clothing. Her thin body again becomes a symbol of what the clothing appears to depict: high fashion and refinement. Yet her
feminine appeal which moves between childlike simplicity and sophistication, gives the reader two very different conceptions of the ‘look’ that is presented. She wears the clothing and sets forth the appearance of a mature fashion conscious woman, but at the same time her docile, unassertive presence, thin body image and expressionless features more closely resemble that of a young child.

Another example where thinness conveys conflict within the expression of femininity can be seen in the October 1996 issue of Vogue (p.213), in an advertisement for Isaac Mizrahi clothing line. Here a tall, thin shapeless model, wearing a flowing white pant suit appears to be daydreaming as she gazes into the sky, and expresses a hand gesture likening her to an innocent child, pondering the wonders of the world. She appears almost bewildered and unaware of her surroundings and she epitomizes a passive construction of femininity devoid of the physical characteristics of womanhood. Her fragile, curveless body is a canvass upon which this beautiful, sensual designer clothing is presented to the reader. Her body becomes a crucial element in the entire ‘look’ that is promoted within this imagery. Yet at the same time, her effortless pose and the feeling of passive elegance that excudes from her through the ease with which she presents this ‘look’, creates a sensual appeal and quite different notion of femininity. There is a tension in the dynamic created by the image which seems to, on the one hand beckon attention, but on the other, shows disconcern like that of a carefree child.

Similarly, in a fashion layout within the May 1997 issue of Vogue (p.326), a feature entitled “Flower Language”, depicts several young women in strappy, floral designer summer dresses prancing around a tropical paradise [See Appendix A]. Under such captions as “summer’s long dresses are sheer
femininity", childlike images of beauty are portrayed through bashful poses and the coy glances into the camera. The women in the images while at the same time, appear feminine and sultry. They stare into the camera in a way which denotes a feeling of allure and sensual appeal and in so doing, they entice the reader. While they beckon the gaze of the female reader into a world of fantasy and imagination, they also depict the look of sexuality and wanting of male attention. The Oscar de la Renta and Valentino dresses may stretch far beyond the attainability of the average reader, yet the thin images of beauty that perfectly display these fashions present the 'look' of fantasy.

This tension between girlhood and womanhood is also expressed in the September 1996 issue of Elle (p.243). Here, in an advertisement for Easel, a young model lies across a a black couch with her immaculately manicured hands placed suggestively towards the upper part of her thigh. She stares seductively into the camera lens and conveys a look that appears to beckon sexual attention. With her grace and finesse, her thin body image displays the designer fashion with perfection. However, at the same time she looks to be engulfed by the chair like a small child. Her glance into the camera suggests inexperience and innocence. The caption, "are you an easel girl?" (italics added) further expresses the portrayal of femininity as both sophistication and allure as well as childlike and naive. The look slides back and forth between these two elements and creates a tension between the two.

Within many of these images thinness becomes reflective of status and high social class. This is further reinforced through the inclusion of images of media celebrities such as actresses and fashion supermodels who epitomize this ideal. For example, in the September 1996 issue of Elle (pp. 480-500), an article entitled "The Season Of The Suit," begins by introducing the fashion feature in the form of a story describing various types of women's suits, from
the traditional, to the military, to the tailored. The fashion layout features several exceptionally thin models displaying these designer creations, as well as a number of celebrities, including Shirley Manson, lead singer of 'Garbage' and actress Isabella Rossellini. These women, both of whom appear indistinguishable from the models presented throughout the pages of this feature, serve to further equate the notion of thinness as a symbol of status and success.

In these examples, it may be suggested that thinness within the context of high fashion is not promoted explicitly through techniques and strategies to attain this ideal standard of beauty. There appears to be less direct linkage between editorial and advertising material in high fashion magazines. While this may be in part due to the fewer number of editorial features contained within these types of publications, it may also be explained by the process of consumerism and the goal that fashion magazines seek to attain. In introducing ideal notions of beauty, fashion magazines entice readers into a world of fantasy and imagination. This is reinforced by the inclusion of symbols of the good life of which appearance and looks are an important element. Editorials often feature socialites and celebrities who epitomize thinness as an idealized standard of beauty and this ideal becomes the key to, and a symbol of, wealth, beauty and success. In exposing readers to this dynamic the editorials focus on, and suggest to readers that in order to enter into this subculture, they must among other things, approximate these ideal notions of beauty. Within this context thinness is representative of elite social class. In my own experience as someone who has struggled with eating disorders, my first notion of thinness as an ideal which I sought to attain revolved around the ways in which this body image was a path leading to the offer of bigger and better things. Within the fashion magazines I consumed, it
seemed to me that everyone who was anyone, was thin. This ideal standard was a necessary element in attaining other aspects of the good life such as success and popularity. My negotiation of the thin body as a means to an end fostered my obsessive pursuit of this ideal construct. Its importance lay in what it represented to me and, what I felt it could lead me to.

Within these fashion magazines, advertisements for hair, make-up and skin, as well as jewellery, accessories and perfume are presented as enhancements to construct associations between thinness and elite social class. Yet the body often remains an area untouched. Within magazines such as Vogue, Elle or Harper’s Bazaar the reader is seldom offered images that deviate from this pervasive standard of thinness and attractiveness. However, this idealized standard is not something that needs to be, nor can be worked on. Rather it is expressed as a logical or natural extension of the ‘look’ that is promoted to the reader through the advertising and editorial make-up of the fashion publication. Many of the images are displayed and laid out in the form of an editorial where a story describes the clothing and style of the fashion feature and various captions set the mood and tone of the images, enticing the reader into a world of pleasure and fantasy. Paid advertisements for accessories and clothing are often found sandwiched between several pages of fashion layouts which creates a sense of continuity. The continual presence of thinness as an idealized standard of beauty presents the body as a canvass upon which the designer fashions are displayed and further enhances the ideal ‘look’ that is offered to the reader.

As mentioned previously in the paper, the magazines chosen for this analysis are a selection that may not be representative of all women’s fashion magazines. An issue that is especially important to consider is that Vogue, Elle and Harper’s Bazaar are in my opinion, aimed at a white female
audience. The ‘look’, which is constructed through the dynamic of accessories, hair, clothing and especially body image, is one which promotes whiteness as the norm within these particular magazines. It is therefore interesting and important to explore the racial representation within such publications. For example, in the May 1997 issue of Harper’s Bazaar (p.65), the woman modeling the elegant Gucci dress in the advertisement is a woman of colour. Her presence, like so many of the images discussed here, conveys a passive yet simple elegance, through which thinness becomes representative of elite social class. Her thin bare arms and elongated torso display a sophisticated black evening dress. Within this portrayal, her racial identity appears to be disguised or eliminated. Her ‘otherness’ is glossed over and the reader may not immediately be aware of her identity as an African American woman. Rather this image is cloaked under a veil that suggests status and high class appeal through clothing and fashion. Her ‘otherness’ does not gain focus as a crucial defining component of this presentation.

A similar blurring of cultural or ethnic distinctiveness is further illustrated in an almost identical advertisement in the Vogue June 1997 issue (pp.96-97) where a white model in the same pose is wearing exactly the same dress. As Willis suggests this type of depiction endorses a “deracinated, deculturated black integer in a white equation” (Willis, 1991:112). The image of the woman of colour within the Gucci advertisement is a carbon copy of the same view of a white model, suggesting her likeness to the dominant ideal of white beauty, hence eliminating racial identity as a distinct element of high fashion representations of femininity. Her inclusion does not challenge the status quo. Rather, given her token status, she blends in with the cultural content of the publication with little opportunity to either create tension or attention through her presence.
In a similar way the blurring or neutralizing of racial identity is depicted in the October 1996 issue of Elle, (pp.180-190). A fashion editorial for the Guess designer label features an extremely young, thin woman modelling the latest in the seasons current fashion trends. She stares blankly into the camera in one shot, makes childish faces in another, and looks bewildered in another as she stares away from the camera. Each photograph depicts her as a passive, coy and somewhat bashful child, although the clothing she models is not reflective of this notion. Instead it appears too grown up for this young, innocent-looking teen. One of the most striking aspects of these images is that they portray a young girl who is undeniably of mixed race, yet who appears to be depicted such that her racial identity is indistinguishable. Her ‘look’ is neutralized in a way which allows her to disappear into, and leave undisturbed, the whiteness that exists as the norm within the pages of the publication.

I feel that this type of characterization of women of colour may be even more harmful than the omission of their imagery altogether. The inclusion of minority women within advertisement and editorial material in ways which serve to blur the boundaries between their images and those of white women, appears to deny the existence and uniqueness of cultural diversity. Occluding racial identity serves to further reinforce stereotypical assumptions and may, in my opinion, bring about more troubling issues that further promote minority women as the ‘other’ within this type of media outlet. It is important to consider the intended audience of the publications chosen here. I feel that the presumed reader is white. The primary goal of consumption is directed towards white women. Therefore, the inclusion of token images of minority women, does not challenge the inherent whiteness that exists throughout the context of the magazine but rather serves to further reinforce
its dominance.

Another type of issue surrounding racial representation in these fashion publications can be seen in the June 1997 edition of *Vogue* (pp.252-259) (See Appendix B). Here an editorial entitled “Beyond Bronze” focuses on the colour brown as one of the best choices in swimwear for the current seasons trends. The article features several images of an African American woman displaying various styles of bathing suits and bikinis. She has a long sleek torso and shows off a thin, seemingly flawless physique. She is also depicted as exotic and sensual, appearing like a statue as the camera angle catches her golden brown skin glistening in the sunlight. Her hair and make-up are uniquely and dramatically fashioned in a manner which appears to overdramatize the distinctness of her racial identity. Willis (1991) suggests that this type of portrayal of models as exotic and different, may in fact serve to further perpetuate ethnic and racial stereotypes. Through such an intense expression of cultural imagery and racial difference, these images may perpetuate the position of women of colour as the ‘other’. These types of characterizations offer to the reader, and in this case the white female reader, extreme images of minority women that are distinct and different. Setting minority women apart as exotic or unusual creates a tension and may further reinforce the barrier that separates them from the mainstream.

These are a few examples of the ways in which women of colour or minority women are represented within the realm of magazine advertising and marketing through the look of, in many cases, “racial homogeneity” (Willis,1991:120). Ironically, this discussion has explored only a small selection of images due to the limited availability of such examples within the material chosen for study. This in itself draws attention to the existence of problems with the inclusion or lack thereof, of race and ethnicity within this
type of media outlet. In depicting women whose features suggest no one particular race, this image of the ‘other’ becomes a neutral representation. By displaying images which deny cultural diversity, this neutral look blurs the boundaries between the characterization of white women and women of colour and undermines their uniqueness. Similarly, the portrayal of minority women as exotic and different may also serve to promote racial and ethnic stereotypes. In fashion magazines such as Vogue, Elle and Harper’s Bazaar, where whiteness is the norm, I would suggest that whether minority women are shown as similar or different to white women or, whether they are excluded altogether, the result may be the same and women of colour are still at risk of further exploitation.

In my analysis I have alluded to how the imagery within these types of fashion magazines, creates pleasure for readers. Through this, it is my suggestion that the process of consumption, which I have argued is a central goal for media gatekeepers, is endorsed. In examining this relationship it is important to look at the audience for whom these types of magazines are intended. As the previous discussion point outs, the presumed audience is the white female reader. Based on my personal experience, I would also suggest that these publications attract a young, fashion conscious group of females. My own interest in what may be considered upscale fashion publications such as Vogue and Harper’s Bazaar began at the age of sixteen when, along with virtually everyone in my peer group, I showed a keen interest in the clothing and fashions that were exquisitely displayed within these magazines. At the same time, the expensive designer clothing and high status lifestyle that form an integral part of the publications chosen for this study would also suggest that they are aimed at, as McCracken (1993) asserts, an older, more upscale, affluent group of women. Given the diversity of their
appeal, I feel that the promotion of ideal beauty images within fashion publications such as these, is linked to the consumption process in a number of ways.

Magazines such as *Vogue*, *Elle* and *Harper’s Bazaar* convey different representations or ideal images of beauty. Taken together the imagery within these fashion magazines creates a world of illusion. Not all women desire or attempt to emulate what they see before them and for many, the magazines are simply vehicles of pleasure, or an escape from reality. Readers are offered notions of what society has deemed acceptable (white) standards of beauty and attractiveness. These ideals are formed through among other things, the dynamic of clothing, accessories, and body image as well as a fashion culture offering elements of the good Me. As a result, “people can get ideas of who {and how} they want to present themselves as by looking at the women” (McCracken, 1993:7). For many there is distance between the imaginary world of the magazines and that of its readers. As one reader of *Cosmopolitan* commented, “I like to imagine that I can someday be like the women in the magazines - beautiful, successful, etc” (McCracken, 1993:6). The publications feed fantasy and promote a sense of delight in the momentary indulgence into this illusionary world. There may be a number of ways in which readers achieve pleasure through these images of ideal beauty and attractiveness.

Fashion magazines such as *Vogue*, *Elle* and *Harper’s Bazaar* play a crucial role in dictating and depicting icons of beauty and for many readers, the images they present merely add to the element of fantasy that is created throughout the pages of these publications. I would speculate however, that for the elite, sophisticated, wealthy reader, the expensive designer clothing and high status lifestyle that is presented in these upscale fashion magazines may be pleasurable because these items are within reach and can be bought.
Through the purchase of the exclusive designer gowns, and exquisite accessories, perfume and jewellery, the reader, who has both the inclination and ability to approximate the purchasable ‘look’ established within the magazines, engages in the process of consumption directly. Here, “cultural investment” in these types of images is, as Roland Barthes suggests, possible because “the image is also somehow within the means of the audience” (Barthes, 1983 as cited in McCracken, 1993:165). Within this context, pleasure and fantasy are still created within the fashion pages even when the reader has the ability to cross the boundary between the real and the imagined.

Through the dream world of fashion magazines, those who may be unable to make this type of cultural investment in attaining a particular fashion such as Versace or Armani, can achieve pleasure from the imitation of this ‘look’ or trend through less expensive means. The images within the editorial and advertising features of these publications may be “savored and imitated by many readers who can afford only lower-priced likenesses” (McCracken, 1993:169). Readers can participate in the world of fantasy in this way by copying and creating images of themselves which fit within these ideal notions of beauty. The magazines also offer the reader the opportunity to snatch a small piece of this exclusivity through the promotion of smaller items which carry the designer label. Items which are more affordable such as perfume, make-up or accessories become not only a means through which this imaginary world may be entered, but the very ownership of such articles may make the reader aware that the possibilities to own a larger piece of the dream, such as a costly designer fashion, do exist. In this way, there is a ‘tension or equilibrium’ between the real and the dreamed. “By linking utopian dreams to real ones, however, the magazine facilitates other kinds of consumption and attracts a growing number of advertising pages”
While readers may be aware of the contradictions between their real sense of self, and the imaginary self that they fantasize about while consumed in these publications, they may nonetheless gain pleasure from these images (McCracken, 1993).

It is my suggestion that in creating pleasure for readers, the imagery within women’s magazines is inextricably linked to the process of consumption. This discussion has alluded to the complexity of this relationship. For some women, fashion magazines such as Vogue and Harper’s Bazaar allow an escape from the reality that surrounds them as they imagine themselves within this illusion. For others, pleasure comes from the imitation of these icons of beauty that can be attained through select purchasing decisions. However, I would speculate that for some, the pleasure created through the imagery of women’s magazines may blur the boundary between fantasy and reality. It has been argued that,

The numerous levels of women’s attraction to this form of mass culture frequently disguise the fact that the attractive experiences are ideologically weighted and not simply innocent arenas of pleasure. The visual, verbal, and sometimes olfactory signifiers in these magazines offer women multiple layers of signifieds: along with the pleasure come messages that encourage insecurities, heighten gender stereotypes, and urge reifying definitions of the self through consumer goods. (McCracken, 1993:9)

As my own experience illustrates, there may be tension in negotiating this imagery in the process of identity construction. The level of pleasure created and expressed by women’s magazines may foster uncertainty and insecurity among those who consume the images.

As someone who has struggled with eating disorders, my pursuit and obsessive preoccupation with thinness began at a level of fantasy. Through my desire to indulge into the dream world of high fashion culture created by these ideals, I became consumed by the realm of fashion magazines. Imagining myself within the images set before me, I wanted to be like the
models yet I had no real sense of the attainability, or lack thereof, of these notions of beauty. My behaviour was influenced in many ways by these notions. I, perhaps like many women, began by buying small pieces of this dream. First a lipstick, then a hair accessory, then perfume, scarfs and other more affordable items. I followed the trends and modelled my own self image around the types of beauty ideals I was exposed to. While I was unable to purchase the designer labels, I imitated and copied the styles and trends. Yet what I feel may have set me apart from others within my peer group who also sought to attain the 'look' of Vogue or Elle, was that the boundaries between my own world and the illusion created in these high fashion magazines became blurred. The images on the page fostered in me a sense of wanting. While the 'look' was something that I could approximate through clothing and accessories, the thin body that flaunted this look was a crucial part of the dynamic. For me, thinness was more than a body image, it was a ticket to the things that the models had access to such as the good life, beauty and success. Thinness became a fundamental component of this lifestyle and through the manipulation and control of my own body I sought to disrupt the barrier between illusion and reality. Simply imitating these icons of beauty through clothing and other material elements, for me was not enough.

At the initial stages of my eating pathology my pursuit of thinness was guided by my notion of the thin body as a passive construct through which I negotiated my desired version of femininity. This conception came from my personal reading of images in fashion magazines. Looking at the thin willowy images of women and girls that fill the pages of the publications chosen for this study, my analysis suggests that they reflect a delicate construction of femininity through passive gestures and expressions. This is expressed
through thinness as childlike innocence, sophisticated elegance, or as shown in a number of examples, an interplay of both elements. Many of the models are extremely young and there is a level of tension between adolescence and womanhood. While the women are often portrayed in mature adult settings, adorned in sensual and exotic fashions, they are devoid of the traits of womanhood and are instead depicted in a bashful and childlike manner. These were the types of images that I sought to attain. Thinness within the context of high fashion and within the pages of *Vogue, Elle* and *Harper's Bazaar* represented something quite fragile and passive for me. It was an image that I felt most closely approximated my desired notion of femininity.

Within the magazines I analyzed for the purpose of this study, I feel that thinness is conveyed as something that is attainable by everyone. It is simply assumed to exist. There are no tips or features on how to achieve or maintain a standard of beauty that approximates the ideal body image on the page. Rather, through the promotion of a fashion culture, the designer labels and accessories establish a dynamic where the thin body image is the starting template to flaunt these creations. Thinness within this context is less explicit. While acquisition of the designer fashions may be out of reach for the majority of women, the images allow women to feel as though they are part of this high culture merely through their indulgence in the magazine. The very substance of the magazines convince readers of their value and superiority just by virtue of reading it and, as McCracken (1993) suggests, they learn that to be like the ideal, they must consume both the culture and consumer goods.

Through my exposure to these ideals, appearance and looks became representative of a measure of self worth. Presenting thinness as an innate characteristic allowed me to view this accomplishment as a sign of something
greater. As a result, in my obsession with achieving a thin body, I conveyed the resulting ideal that I attained through my controlled food intake and excessive exercise, as something that was accomplished with ease. I longed to be like those who gracefully adorned the pages of these magazines. While I starved myself and focused purely on attaining my desired figure, I felt envy from those around me. The more compliments I received on how great I looked, the more obsessed I became. I believed that in achieving what I thought was everyone's ideal body, I had the advantage over those around me. I was convinced that my friends resented me because of what I represented to them when in fact the struggle to approximate this unrealistic body image was almost more than I could handle. In reality I was seeking to achieve more than an ideal body image. Rather, through this image I sought to attain a lifestyle and the promises that it represented to me.

Within the magazines used for this study, the creations of Gucci, Chanel and Armani may be beyond realization for readers, yet the 'look' or thin body image that flaunts these fashions becomes a part of, and enhances the fantasy and pleasure created through this imagery. It was apparent to me at the time that I internalized these images, that the designer fashions such as Armani and Gucci found throughout Vogue, Elle and Harper's Bazaar were far beyond my reach. Among other things, my financial limitations made it impossible for me to imagine purchasing the exclusive fashions that were so often promoted as affordable. However, the types of notions that these images came to represent, and the promises they signified to me, served as a vehicle of fantasy through which I sought to emulate these ideals. As shown here in my study of fashion magazines, thinness becomes presented in association with high status and high culture and the body is the canvass upon which expensive fashions are expressed. Through the clothing, the body is the focus
of attention and in displaying designer labels and related products, these advertisements convey, "... the promise of approving attention on the reader's body, as she imagines herself wearing the dress, in 'perfect form'" (McCracken, 1993:164). As my own experience illustrates, attainment of the ideal body was not merely an end in itself. It was a means to an end. I perceived it as a way for me to enter into the world of pleasure that I was exposed to through the realm of fashion publications.

My eating disorder did not initially develop purely as a result of the forces of media imagery and my negotiation and internalization of these ideals. It began at a crucial stage in my life when, in addition to being disrupted physically after immigrating from my country of birth to Canada at the difficult age of sixteen, I was experiencing a great deal of emotional upheaval in the process of developing my own identity. For me, these images played an important role within this context of change. They created an imaginary world through which I came to value thinness as an ideal notion of beauty: an ideal which played on my insecurities and uncertainties and became a standard against which I measured my own body image and, more importantly, my self worth. Consequently, I believe that this personal experience as well as my exploration of the fashion magazines chosen for this analysis illustrate the various ways in which these publications may serve as powerful vehicles of fantasy for many women. Women's magazines are an influential mass media vehicle of popular culture. As shown in this analysis, they serve a number of functions and promote messages to the reader through a complex interplay of images combining pleasure, fantasy and reality. In the next section I will explore the realm of fitness magazines in order to examine the role of linkages between advertising and editorial material in presenting ideal standards of beauty in these magazines.
3.4.2 Fitness - Shape, Fit, Fitness

One of the most notable aspects of magazines focused on women's fitness or health is that there appears to be less overt or purchased advertisements running throughout the material. Instead these publications are primarily focused on more indirect forms of address through which various body images and ideals are expressed. This is accomplished through the use of covert advertising where there is a more subtle linkage between editorials and advertising material, for example when an advertisement featuring a series of workout tapes is placed adjacent to an editorial focusing on a new diet and fitness regime. Covert advertising, or advertising that is contained indirectly within the editorial content of a publication, extends structural links to the purchased advertising, resulting in the creation of a continual, integrated whole (McCracken, 1993). Through this process various ideal of beauty are endorsed.

Magazines like Shape and Fit "promote ideal body images for women that are to be attained through exercise, dieting, grooming, and the purchase of products" (McCracken, 1993:262). In channelling readers' desires to attain the ideal body image, fitness publications include features on "fashion, cosmetics, haircare, swimwear, toiletries, and diet books which correlate either with current advertising in these magazines or the publishers' hopes for expanded areas of ad revenue" (McCracken, 1993:265). Within this context, the reader who is also the consumer, is active in the process of attaining the ideal standard of beauty presented on the page.

Covert advertising is a complex process which operates in a diversity of ways to endorse specific types of beauty and in so doing McCracken suggests that "editorial material gives general support to consumption through its
format, subject matter, product recommendations, and promotions of feelings of inadequacy in the reader” (1993:42). One of the primary ways in which this is accomplished is through the placement and tie-in of advertising messages to related editorial material which strategically conveys to the reader a correlation between the two elements.

In particular, advertisements for exercise or fitness-related activities frequently appear directly adjacent to editorials focused upon reworking problem areas of the body. In the May 1997 issue of *Fitness and Shape* magazine (p. 10), the editor’s column immediately arouses our concern with body image. It asserts that, “no matter what your summer memories are, one thing that never changes is our heightened interest in our bodies. Are we thin? Toned?” The article, which proceeds by urging readers to “start training in order to sculpt our body and achieve ‘the look’”, is situated directly across from an advertisement for “The Ultimate Abdominal Conditioner” from Nordic Track, which features images of the ideal body that may be attained through the use of this product. One of the most important aspects of this advertisement is that it appears very close to the beginning on the publication. Just like the magazine cover, this positioning of an image serves as an interpretive lens for what is to follow and shapes the magazine’s cultural characteristics (McCracken, 1993:36). There are two important elements at work within this representation. The interplay of both the early positioning of advertisements, and the thematic linkage between advertising and editorial content appear to provide the reader with a window or view of the magazines structural theme. In analyzing the issues of *Fitness, Fitness* and *Shape* chosen within the category of fitness, it would seem that the early placement of this type of linkage between advertising and editorial is consistent throughout each magazine. Immediately the reader is given
strategies and instructional advice which, when featured alongside various products and equipment, allow her to work towards the attainability of the ideal standard of beauty endorsed within the content of the publication.

This linkage between the promotion of the ideal body image and product advertising is similarly illustrated in the May 1997 issue of Shape (p.76) magazine. Here, sandwiched between a four page editorial illustrating appropriate exercise techniques for specific body parts, is an advertising campaign promoting a “Lifestyle and Weight Management Certificate” to allow individuals to learn more about maintaining a “healthier” body image. Through this advertisement the goal, namely a healthier appearance, is promoted as attainable for anyone, thus allowing the reader to image herself as an active participant in the control and manipulation of her own body image.

Similarly, in the May 1997 issue of Fit (p.80), an editorial dealing with the regulation of eating habits to avoid weight gain, features an exceptionally young, thin woman standing on weighing scales perplexed about the perils of weight gain. This is immediately followed by a Stairmaster advertisement displaying the caption, “The Best Way to Lose Weight and Stay in Shape”. This ad further serves to convey the image that is attainable through these products and active participation in the result.

These examples draw attention to the important role of advertisement placement with editorial material within the realm of fitness publications. McCracken argues that “magazines gear editorial content to complement the concerns of advertisers and predispose readers to the advertising messages. Accordingly, a general consumptionist ideology pervades the editorial content” (1993:42). Through the placement and tie-in of articles with purchased advertising, the expression of standards of beauty within both
arenas, become cultivated as ideal images attainable through product consumption. “The infrastructural foundation of a magazine’s special image is linked to consumer purchasing” (McCracken, 1993:43).

Another primary advertising strategy in setting forth a standard ideal of beauty focuses on the tie-in theme in which a product appears to be less directly related to a particular editorial. In the September 1996 *Shape* (p.64), a thin, teenage-looking woman, baring her fat-free mid-rift and sporting the latest workout and sportswear fashions, is featured alongside an advertisement for a series of workout videos promising the best way to achieve a thin and beautiful body. The linkage may be that the only way to look as good as her in these fabulous outfits is to purchase the featured products that promise to be the key to success in attaining this ideal.

This theme is further illustrated in the May 1997 issue of *Fitness* (pp.89-100), an article entitled “Six Weeks To A Beach-Ready Body,” features a young, extremely thin woman displaying a series of workout, nutritional, and fitness techniques demonstrating the best way to attain this ideal. The young woman appears focused and concentrated on the task at hand and seldom looks directly at the reader. This feature is closely followed by a fashion layout featuring a selection of summer swimwear modelled by several women who epitomize this ideal body image. It is my suggestion that the close proximity of this editorial material and the advertised swimwear may convey to the reader the assertion that looking good in these products entails the level of hard work and effort that will come from this easy to follow, accessible exercise and diet regime.

This thematic tie-in, whereby the editorial structure supports the purchased advertising in promoting a standard of beauty is further illustrated in the May 1997 issue of *Shape* (pp.98-103). Here, a series of editorial features
entitled “success stories” feature women who have transformed their body image. These stories are sandwiched between a number of advertisements depicting various ideals of thin beauty. However, the difference within this layout is that the advertisement reinforces the attainability of physical perfection through products unrelated to fitness. Thus, an advertisement for women’s razors features a pair of long, thin, sleek, perfectly shaped legs with the caption “these legs are insured for $1,000,000”, suggesting to the reader that she too can manipulate a particular body part to allow her to imagine herself within this image.

This advertising tie-in technique is further demonstrated in the May 1997 edition of *Fit* (p.84), where readers who share their secrets of success in accomplishing enormous weight loss, display their dramatic fitness results, along with a testimony to the happiness and completeness in their lives after becoming thinner and “healthier”. This is followed by a series of purchased advertisements for various workout and exercise videos and equipment reinforcing the connection between the attainability of these ideals through the consumption of the products promoted within the advertisements. In these examples, readers extol the virtues of their ideal body image and thinness is translated into happiness.

The “before and after” testimonials that appear in virtually every fitness magazine, allow the ordinary reader to see herself within these images. They present an image of reality aimed to convince her that she, too, can accomplish similar results. By suggesting to the reader that she is in control of her own destiny, just like the women before her, these features depict a standard of beauty as something attainable and realistic for everyone, regardless of biological constraints or financial limitations. These features attempt to convey the notion that if an ordinary person can accomplish such
a goal and become beautiful, the reader herself is capable also of striving towards this ideal.

In the October 1996 issue of *Fitness* (pp.52-55), the tie-in between editorial content and the process of advertising is illustrated in an article entitled “Mind Over Fatter”, which begins with the statement, “if you weren’t born a naturally thin person, you can become one.” The article features a young, thin twentyish-looking young woman. It discusses various strategies in maintaining this thin body including, “think healthy, and you’ll get thin”, and “the things you do to keep your body healthy are the very same things you do to keep your body thin”, and is sandwiched between two advertisements promoting low fat, light food items. One of the products, a ‘light’ chocolate bar, is displayed with the caption “God’s Gift To Women” further reinforcing the promise of something great through consumption of this advertised product. This something great may be the ultimate reward: the opportunity to have it both ways: eating sweets, yet remaining thin.

There are numerous examples where low fat, low calorie or light food related advertisements are placed adjacent to editorial material focusing on weight loss or diet issues in attaining a superior body image. In the May 1997 edition of *Shape* (p.94), a weight loss question and answer feature which provides readers with tips and information on how to alleviate or diminish body flaws, is immediately followed by an advertisement for a reduced fat chocolate bar. This association appears to supply the reader with a solution to common problems and presents a way for her to connect with those who may be experiencing similar concerns.

In introducing a standard of beauty as something every woman can attain, the covert advertising process also relies on the technique of brand reciprocity. Here specific brand name products are recommended within the
editorial material as a means through which the ideal may be achieved. In the September 1996 issue of Shape (pp.102-106), a four page article on various exercise and fitness equipment to help readers attain a "top" body, features a women baring her mid-rift and displaying what may be considered by many to be a perfect flawless body image. Within the article several pieces of brand name equipment including the Schwinn's Airdyne ($499), the Bodyguard Quantum LS ($1,799), and TRUE 500 HRC ($3,295) \(^1\), are recommended as invaluable in providing readers with the opportunity to attain a body that may approximate the model in the article.

In the same issue (p.140), an editorial feature entitled "Hard Targets", provides readers with an exercise and fitness routine designed specifically to target those areas most problematic for women who want to become/stay thin: hips, thighs and the butt. Yet the model who is demonstrating the techniques appears to be the epitome of physical perfection with a body which displays none of the aforementioned "problem areas". The article contains instructions designed to lead the reader through the process of attaining the physical ideal presented by the super thin model. In addition, it endorses the book The Ultimate Lean Routine, to provide additional support and instruction in reaching this goal. In the same issue of Shape (pp.128-132), an article espousing the importance of health and fitness in achieving weight loss and maintaining an ideal body image, recommends several "must-have" workout videos as crucial components in realizing this goal. The value of these products, many of which are celebrity endorsed - "Jane Fonda's Workout Lean Routine", "Your Personal Best Workout with Elle Macpherson", and the "Donna-Mite Aerobic Workout" - is further

\(^1\) Schwinn's Airdyne - (dual action exercise bike), Bodyguard Quantum LS - (stepping fitness machine), TRUE 500 HRC - (treadmill).
reinforced by a feature on the fifteen “top bodies” in Hollywood with pictures of celebrities who are meant to represent the epitome of physical perfection for women and in this case, for men too.

The promotion of an ideal standard of attractiveness is also endorsed through celebrity appraisal. This is illustrated in the September 1996 issue of Shape (p.186), where an editorial features again a young, thin woman demonstrating various exercises that may be done at home. These suggest to the reader how to attain a fit, healthy and ultimately, given the model presented within the photograph, a thin body image. In addition, the workout is fully endorsed by one of the stars of ESPN’s “Bodies in Motion” television show. Providing readers with a frame of reference, particularly in the form of a media personality, may further strengthen the value of the editorial content in offering readers a standard of beauty which, through the consumption of products and services, they may aspire to. Through celebrity appraisal, these editorials send the message that these individuals are both glamorous and beautiful, as well as healthy, fit, popular and successful. While they are characterized as the types of role models that readers should wish to identify with and emulate, they are also representative of a standard of beauty that may not be equally attainable by all individuals.

Similarly, in the June 1997 issue of Shape (pp.94-99), an article featuring ways to shape up certain problem areas of the body shows a young, thin model displaying a series of steps that focus around the use of a strength training cord which is used to build resistance and shape the body. The article mentions the endorsement and promotion of these techniques by a well known fitness professional and coincidentally author of the book Let’s Get Real. In addition, several products are also recommended including the “Jump Stretch Inc” which supplies the conditioning equipment used in the
article as well as "Nike's Air Max Mundo" total conditioning shoe.

One of the most important aspects in almost all of the advertising and editorial material that feature women either in exercise or other fitness related activity, is that the women, unlike those within many of the high fashion magazines, seldom look directly at the camera. Instead, they are primarily shown with a focused and concentrated stance directed towards the activity they are illustrating. This may serve to further reinforce the notion of control, concentration, and power that these types of images convey to the reader, in working towards and striving to attain a certain standard of beauty. While the thin body image promoted within the fashion magazines I analyzed is incorporated as part of the complete 'look' that is offered to the reader, within the fitness publications the body itself appears to be the primary focus of the readers’ attention.

The linkage between editorial material within fitness magazines and purchased covert advertising, endorses a certain ideal body image as something that is an attainable standard of attractiveness for readers. The focus is on how to achieve the standard. The “how” which encompass a number of elements including what to buy, what to eat, what exercise and fitness regime to follow, allows the woman herself to become active in the manipulation and control of her body image. Through this, she is given agency in attaining a particular beauty ideal. The articles present both strategies to maintain this ideal while at the same time reinforcing the accessibility of this representation through the consumption of products and services as well as celebrity appraisal. It is a process which involves careful, rather than uncontrolled consumption. While it may require skill and discipline to strive towards attaining thinness as an idealized standard, it also takes knowledge and effort to pay attention to and purchase the correct
products that will allow such a goal.

While in many ways the active participation of the reader to fulfil the goal set before her may be a positive element within the advertising dynamic of fitness magazines, the body ideal represented there continues to be an unrealistic standard of thinness for the majority of women. Cloaking what in reality amounts to the expression of an unreasonable thin body image within the auspices of fitness and health, may be as problematic in the promotion of disturbed body image perception and eating pathology as the more overt forms of thinness depicted in alternative media outlets of popular culture. I will address this issue later in the discussion. Through these techniques, the magazines seek to convince the reader that she has the capacity to form her own destiny, if and only if she makes all the right moves, including working out and, purchasing the correct products.

In my own experience with eating pathology, fitness has become a means through which I strive to attain an idealized image of thinness. I focus on excessive exercise as a way to assume control over my body. To me this represents an active construction of the notion of femininity in which I am afforded agency. The manipulation of my body image has become a means to not only lose weight, but to express a ‘look’ that defies the stereotypical characterization of thinness as weak and passive. Ultimately, however, physical exertion through fitness and exercise has covered up the reality of my own expectations surrounding body image. Exercise allows me to convey the appearance of health and well being when in reality my desired ideal continues to be an ultra thin standard of beauty that may be unrealistic to attain.

In further promoting fitness as a means for women to take charge of the construction of their bodies, the images within various editorial and
advertising material in this type of publication, often denote power and strength. The models within both advertisements and editorials are shown actively working on various exercise equipment, or lifting weights, or participating in similarly energetic endeavours such as running, swimming or cycling. While this seems to characterize women with the appearance of control and power, it also sends the message that readers should always be working towards, thinking about, and striving to attain these thin idealized standards of beauty.

In the May 1997 issue of *Shape* (pp.104-115), an article focuses on getting ready for summer through the power of exercise (See Appendix C). It features two women demonstrating a number of fitness techniques, including bicep curls, abdominal crunches and leg exercises. The women are young and thin with barely an ounce of excess flesh between them. They do not appear to be a representative model for the goal that the article is attempting to assert. Similarly, in the September 1996 edition of *Shape* (pp.140-147), the model in an editorial featuring various ways to target problem areas of the body in attaining an ideal figure, is also thin, toned and unlikely to possess any of the hip, butt or ab “problem” areas she so convincingly demonstrates to the reader.

These examples draw attention to one complex way in which idealized beauty standards are expressed through the linkage between editorial and advertising material. Within fitness magazines, it appears that, as McCracken (1993) suggests, advertisements are rarely viewed as interruptions. Rather, advertisements and editorial material are linked through a more “pervasive homologous structuration” which serves to create a logical extension between the two (1993:38). While there may be additional factors at play in this complex dynamic, this is one angle through which this relationship can be
viewed. Whether the promotion of an ideal body image is accomplished through advertisements that promote low fat food items, exercise equipment or celebrity endorsed products, this relationship between editorials and advertising is a complex matter. While specific links between products may be mentioned frequently within the editorial content, they also appear throughout the publications within fashion features, advice columns and cover credit. However, the common theme throughout is the process of consumption. “As ideological projections, they [the images] present as natural and expected the magazine’s promotion of consumption” (McCracken, 1993:43).

Within fitness magazines, attaining the idealized body image is promoted in relation to fitness and exercise. Through the editorial content, readers receive the message that they must be constantly seeking to attain and working in pursuit of this standard of beauty. However, based on my observations for this study, it would seem that the ideal notions of beauty expressed within fitness magazines more closely resemble the thin supermodels that I found within fashion magazines than an expression of health and wellbeing. I feel that in attempting to convey a positive and healthy process through which readers may actively mould and shape their own body image, fitness magazines are at risk of undermining the very notions they seek to endorse. I would speculate that these types of representations convey a mixed message to the reader. While fitness and exercise are offered as an important and beneficial means through which to attain a healthy body image, this is not accurately reflected in the exceptionally thin and in many cases unhealthy-looking women that I found to be pervasive within much of the fitness magazines in this examination. Such images may negatively impact readers of these types of publications.
Considering these potentially harmful effects, I feel that it is important to look more closely at the way that exercise may be used, and in some cases abused, by women. Within my own experience, exercising began as a way to attain a healthier, fitter body. Yet as someone who had struggled with an eating disorder, the nature of this activity and the motivation for engaging in fitness and exercise changed. Drawing on both the literature as well as my personal experience, the next section will discuss various forms of exercise and the motivation for fitness and exercise in relation to eating pathology particularly among women.

It has been suggested that the relationship between women and physical activity is both complex and contradictory (Lenskyj, 1993). In particular, the pressure towards ultra thinness has been found to be especially strong for females within aesthetic activities such as gymnastics, figure skating and dance. Researchers disagree about this relationship. Some studies have reported a higher likelihood of dangerous eating practices of those participating in these activities, while other research has found no such difference in the prevalence of eating pathology. Nonetheless, it does appear that those who do not fit an ideal body for such types of activities or sports may in fact be at higher risk for the development of problem eating patterns. The context within which these activities take place, including the high pressure training regime and self deprivation, may prove to be as Lenskyj (1993) suggests, a "breeding ground" for eating pathology. In considering the relationship between exercise and physical activity and the preponderance of eating disorders, Lenskyj develops a feminist perspective to address the important issue of "exercise motivation and behaviour". She suggests that women's eating patterns must be understood along a continuum:

Exercise behaviour can be placed on a continuum ranging from healthy to dangerous, with obsessive/compulsive behaviour at the dangerous extreme. Similarly, on the
continuum of exercise motivation, reasons range from process-oriented (exercise for its own sake) to goal-oriented (exercise as a means to an end, e.g., weight reduction). (Lenskyj, 1993)

Moreover, with the pressures on women to be thin, combined with the guilt and shame that often becomes associated with excess weight, Lenskyj (1993) points to a greater likelihood that "stated reasons for exercise motivation may vary significantly from real reasons". The fitness magazines that I analyzed attempt to promote a positive message about the benefits of exercise and healthy living. Exercise as an end in itself or as a way for women to feel good about their own bodies for their own sake may bring about positive results. However, exercise as a means to an end can prove to be particularly damaging, if as researchers suggest, it goes beyond normative social behaviour and is carried to extremes. For example, exercise and fitness, particularly excessive levels, if undertaken purely as a way to reach another goal such as weight loss, may bring about dangerous consequences. Alternatively, if exercise is used to reach a specific body requirement as is often the case in competitive arenas such as gymnastics or modelling, similar negative effects may result. While the images of women within the fitness publications I explored appear to denote power and control, my analysis suggests that these images may be depicted in ways which are at risk of undermining the positive message of fitness. This is particularly true given the exceptionally thin images expressed within these magazines. Along the continuum of behaviour pointed out by Lenskyj, these types of images stand on the boundary that distinguishes fitness on the one hand as a healthy and beneficial activity, and on the other as something that may be damaging to women's wellbeing.

In relation to my personal experience, my pursuit of, and preoccupation with thinness has led to my use of excessive exercise in
combination with restricted eating practices. What began as an attempt to adhere to fitness as part of the maintenance of a healthy regime became translated into my use of exercise as a means through which to attain my ideal notion of beauty. For me, this ideal image came from my construction of images within fitness magazines such as the ones studied for this analysis. I focused on, and continue to follow, representations that I initially felt were different from those in fashion magazines such as Vogue: images that had become so crucial during the initial stages of my eating pathology. However, as I have consumed ideals that appeared to provide alternative icons of beauty against which to measure my own self image, I have been faced with a very different conflict in negotiating these beauty standards. Given my history of disturbed eating patterns, one of the primary issues that has become problematic in my own experience is my struggle to reach an acceptable level of exercise: to establish a balance between a normal fitness level and one which stretches far beyond an acceptable range of activity. There appears to be a resurgence and renewal of interest in exercise and fitness among both women and men within modern Western society and I too, like so many women, have become consumed into this new wave. Our culture has become inundated with an endless range of fitness and health clubs, exercise videos, as well as new and improved ways to maintain a healthy lifestyle. From the perspective of someone who has struggled with eating disorders, this seemingly positive focus on fitness has for me, created a very different kind of conflict.

The various advertising strategies, including editorial tie-in and brand reciprocity found within the article content of fitness publications, serves to foster the belief that the ideal images of beauty and attractiveness displayed throughout the features, are within reach for readers with the help from
invaluable exercise, fitness and diet related products. However, convincing readers that looking as good as the women in the articles and advertisements is equally attainable for everyone, may prove to be extremely damaging. This is particularly true if, as in many cases, the representations reflect an exceptionally thin and seemingly flawless body image. As a result, while the message within such publications as *Fit, Shape* or *Self* may be that “... fitness is what the truly modern, truly intelligent woman owes herself”, the sad reality may be, as Poulton suggests, that “too bad fitness is just a euphemism for thinness. Too bad that yowling from the depths of this chic new poke is the same scrawny critter that’s been trapped there for three decades, repeating the same old tune: ‘Buy, buy, buy!’” (Poulton, 1996:76).
4.1 Discussion

In this thesis I have tried to show that fitness and fashion magazines utilize diverse techniques to introduce very different conceptions of thinness as an idealized standard of attractiveness for women. While the goal of consumption by women appears to remain the same, this analysis of two categories of women’s magazines has shown that the types of things women are invited to consume and the ways in which this process is reinforced may be very different. Within fitness publications I found a more explicit linkage between editorial and advertising material in promoting idealized beauty images attainable through the process of carefully controlled patterns of consumption. The fashion publications on the other hand, through a culture of fashion and style, presented an idealized standard of thinness as a fundamental component of the desired ‘look’. The process of consumption in attaining this ‘look’ was promoted within a realm of fantasy and pleasure through a complete dynamic that included accessories, clothing, body image, and other elements of the good life.

Within the fitness magazines, the images in the editorials were introduced in relation to a direct process of consumption, whereby a certain standard of attractiveness appeared in close relationship to various purchasable products or services. This linkage between advertising and editorials was, however, a complex one. Through editorials, fitness magazines offer female readers the opportunity to become active in the manipulation of their own body image. Articles featuring various types of
exercise allow the reader to plan and take action in order to control her body. Part of this control includes the careful and controlled process of consumption. In promoting the attainment of these ideal standards of beauty, advertisements are selectively placed, or tied-in with the editorials and induce the reader into purchasing specific products within the vast realm of fitness. It is my suggestion that the 'look' in fitness magazines is one which appears to denote strength and power by and for women. The means through which this look may be approximated allows the reader to become active in striving towards this image. The reader is given the message that the attainability of this ideal is dependent upon skill and control in making the correct purchasing choices and decisions. This is a continual process, one which the reader is always expected to be working towards and striving to fulfill.

Within the high fashion publications, the linkage between advertising and editorial material is less apparent. Most notably, these publications contain considerably more paid or overt advertisements than the fitness magazines. While the majority of these advertisements feature expensive designer labels, such as those from Gucci or Versace, much of the paid advertising also includes beauty products such as makeup, perfume and accessories. It is my suggestion that these products are included as enhancements which further promote a desired standard of feminine attractiveness. The advertisements reiterate a theme in which thinness is presented as a fundamental element within the high fashion lifestyle that makes up the cultural content of these publications. As an ideal body image, thinness is assumed to be integral to this culture of fashion and is expressed as a necessary component of, and a ticket to, wealth, status, and in many cases, success. This idealized standard is further reinforced within the editorial
features through the focus on the fashion world, and the presentation of wealth and social class.

It would appear that through their structural content and process of consumption, these two types of publications are aimed at very different groups of women. Fitness magazines, through the more direct linkage between advertising and editorial material, offer the reader inducements aimed towards products that may allow the attainability of the beauty standards expressed within this medium. In particular, these publications appeal to, and promote an image of a female reader who has an active lifestyle, part of which includes a concern with exercise and nutrition. While this readership could be young or old, business or university oriented, the focus is on the body itself. Through various visual and textual strategies, the fitness magazines I analyzed characterized the body as something that women were able to control and manipulate.

While the majority of material I examined presented the fitness ideal as an exceptionally thin standard of beauty, these magazines, unlike the fashion publications, do not depict women as objects to be looked at. The women in many of the fitness images do not stare seductively into the camera and are not placed in positions that display them as objects of desire for male attention and gaze. Rather, the images often show women as concentrated and focused on the task at hand as they display various techniques and activities. These magazines display the body as the subject of control for the readers’ own personal and positive returns. In striving to attain it, the reader is expected to engage in a carefully controlled process of consumption which includes among other things, what to buy, how to eat and what exercise regime to follow.

Based on my analysis I do believe that in depicting women in this way,
fitness magazines are taking a positive step in showing women in control of their own bodies. Yet, as mentioned, exercise and the motivation for exercise must be acknowledged along a range of behaviour. Inability to distinguish a boundary between safe and excessive levels of this type of physical activity may be cause for concern. While a safe or acceptable level may not signify the same thing for everyone, it denotes, for the average individual, a balanced level of physical activity which must also be considered in relation to other elements such as calorie intake. This danger for exercise to become excessive is compounded by the images of beauty presented within many fitness magazines which seem more reflective of the waif thin models that appear within fashion magazines, than depictions of health and wellbeing. The latter may be more effectively expressed through the inclusion of models who more accurately characterize a standard of beauty epitomized by the majority of women within Western society. An image which is far removed from the thin, flawless form that is so often shown within these publications.

The fashion magazines that I analyzed appear to be aimed at a very different population of women. Within these publications, there is less direct linkage between advertisements and editorial material. Rather, certain standards of beauty are established as part of the larger culture of high fashion through models displaying various designer labels. The presumed reader of these magazines may be the elite sophisticated woman, who is no longer in her teens and who lives a lifestyle of high class appeal. The elements of fantasy that are demonstrated by the high priced, exclusive designer fashions and the cultured lifestyle may also appeal to a much younger audience who strive to emulate these ideals. My own experience is a reflection of this appeal.

This is further reinforced given the up-to-date fashion features and the
latest trends in clothing styles that are part of the editorial material in these publications. However, for both audiences there seems to be contradictions inherent within the imagery. The young, thin, shapeless women may epitomize a body image unattainable for the majority of women, and they also represent a lifestyle that is similarly out of reach. Within these magazines, body image is presented as a means to an elusive end. It is the starting point in promoting a look of high status appeal through clothing, accessories and beauty products. The body is a template upon which these fashions and accessories are displayed and through advertising, various beauty enhancements further promote the process of consumption. Unlike the images I analyzed within the fitness magazines, many of the models in the fashion publications were more directly focused on the camera. They were often looking coyly into the camera, assuming the pose of a playful and innocent child or alternatively, seductively gazing into the lens. The body is not represented or foregrounded for its own sake but rather as a way to display women as objects of desire: for both the male and female gaze. The sexual underpinnings of the images and the interplay of childlike, passive innocence with sultry, sexy feminine appeal, create these models as objects of pleasure for the male gaze and attention. However, the 'look' that is created through careful and focused attention to detail in the clothing, accessories and body image, offer the models and all that they represent as a site of fantasy for the female gaze. They become icons of beauty and perfection for female readers who engage in and become consumed into an imaginary world. Through the seductive or childlike stares into the camera, these images show women to be looked at and within this representation, thinness as an idealized standard of beauty is paramount. While the fitness magazines endorse a notion focused on fitness as a beneficial and strengthening process
which the female reader actively pursues, the images within the fashion publications do not position readers with the same sense of control.

One of the most interesting similarities that I uncovered between the two types of publications was their frequent use of celebrity endorsement. Within fitness magazines, various professionals within the field were often mentioned in editorial features primarily it would seem, as a way to further seduce the reader into the desirability of a certain body image and way of life. These individuals are seen as role models or icons who set forth a preferred beauty ideal towards which readers are expected to strive. In reflecting glamour and popularity, these celebrities and media personalities reinforce the desirability of the images within the pages of these publications. Through these images, magazines stimulate fantasy and desire for the good life which epitomizes glamour, good looks, fulfillment and happiness. Within the fashion magazines it appears that celebrities are introduced or used in editorial material in an attempt to further illustrate the link between thinness as an idealized beauty standard and as a symbol of status and success. In the publications I analyzed for this study, the editorial material which focused on social events among the rich and famous often featured women who epitomized thinness as an ideal beauty standard.

Another notable aspect of the imagery I examined within both types of publications was the representation of women of colour. In general, minority women appeared less frequently than white women in both the fashion and fitness magazines. Interestingly, in the fashion publications, the same women of colour were found both in a number of advertisements and some of the editorials throughout each issue. In particular, Naomi Campbell, one of the most renowned, publicly recognized, and seemingly one of the few internationally successful women of colour within the modelling industry,
was shown in several features in a number of the publications studied. She was often depicted in the types of images that Willis refers to as “deculturated” or “deracinated” where racial identity is blurred or negated (Willis, 1991). As Willis suggests, this type of representation may not necessarily constitute a positive move forward in terms of cultural diversity, given the problems it alludes to through the blurring or elimination of racial identity. The inclusion of minority women either as token images which blend into the cultural content of the magazines, or in ways in which they are portrayed as exotic and different, serves to further reinforce their position as ‘other’ within a context where whiteness is assumed to be the norm.

The continual presence of one super model, Naomi Campbell does however suggest to me something quite interesting. Her inclusion denotes an acceptability not of minority women in general, but of Campbell as an individual within this fashion arena. While she may have attained a considerable level of recognition and popularity within the industry, she seems to represent something that does not threaten the existing white order of things in an arena where women of colour are few and far between. In many ways she approximates a white ideal standard of beauty that has been deemed acceptable and desirable within this fashion arena.

In the fitness magazines I studied, women of colour were similarly under-represented in any form. The images that did appear were again presented in a way which served to disguise or draw attention away from their racial identity. Moreover, unlike the inclusion of a familiar model such as Naomi Campbell in the fashion publications, there was no such continued presence within the fitness magazines I analyzed. One of the few images of an African American woman, for example, was displayed on the cover of the September 1996 issue of Shape. The cover features three women wearing
similar white dresses, each depicting what may be considered by many to be a thin, flawless body image. The one African American woman poses so as to suggest a copy or mirror image of the two white women. While the representation of minority women within women's publications can be viewed as a positive step in drawing attention to racial and cultural diversity, characterizations which attempt to emphasize their likeness to the dominant ideal of white beauty, may not be wholly progressive. Glossing difference appears to undermine the positive features of diversity by shaping the images to mould within the existing order of these magazines. The publications chosen for this study are aimed at the white audience. In addressing white female readers, the images and the process whereby these representations market and promote products and services, is directed towards the white consumer. Attempting to fit these images into a white standard, undermines the positive move that the expression of cultural diversity may otherwise have accomplished and does little to challenge the existing status quo.

What I find most interesting about the exclusion and deracinated images of women of colour from the magazines I explored, is that it seems to suggest that these women are somehow unaffected or unconcerned about appearance or body image, fashion or beauty, health or fitness. In particular, the exclusion of images of minority women may suggest that these women do not aspire to the lifestyle that is promoted within the magazines. In turn, this further reinforces the biased notion that women of colour, particularly African American women, are somehow unaffected by the “cult of thinness” and the subsequent problems surrounding eating pathology (Thompson,1994). With the characterization of beauty ideals tied into the process of consumerism, the selective representation or exclusion of images of racial diversity may also suggest that minority women do not have the
resources, particularly the financial means, to achieve the desired standards of beauty that many white women seek to attain. The promotion of this false notion of minority women as "somehow separate from a society in which beauty standards are an integral part of the socialization of all women", in my opinion serves to perpetuate social stereotypes surrounding race and body image (Thompson, 1994:14).

4.2 Contributions and Implications

So thinness as a contemporary ideal symbolizes many different things. To give it its most progressive sense, it can be understood as an attempt to transcend barriers of class and age, while in its more negative sense it is yet another reworked expression of misogynist tendencies alive in the culture, from a denial of the shape of the feminine form to an attack on how much room a woman should occupy. It is offered as a way out of reality and promoted as the entry to, and badge of, the good life. (Orbach, 1986:76)

I have undertaken an interpretive analysis of the content of two types of current North American women's magazines to explore the role of advertising and the structural links between advertisements and editorial content in presenting socially constructed standards of beauty for women. This thesis is only one small exploration into the complex and ever expanding problem of eating disorders within Western society. It has allowed me to draw attention to, and open up the lines of inquiry into, a number of issues. While thinness as a socially sanctioned ideal of feminine beauty is characterized within high fashion and fitness magazines, my research has drawn attention to the variations within the expression of these images within these two categories of women's magazines. I found that these variations were promoted through the linkage between advertising and editorial material in several different ways. While I uncovered the expression of thinness as an idealized standard of attractiveness through the process of a more direct linkage between advertising and editorials within fitness
magazines, fashion magazines conveyed a similar conception of ideal beauty through a continuity between fashion features and paid advertising. My examination was filtered through my own experience with eating disorders and my negotiation of thinness in relation to socially constructed notions of femininity. These notions came from my reading of, and consumption of images of beauty in different types of magazines. Based on this analysis I would argue that a complex interplay of factors are at work in the representation of thinness in high fashion and fitness magazines.

While it is impossible to make sweeping generalizations based upon the limited confines of this study, my observations from this research suggest that thinness is not a uni-dimensional construct and should not be examined as such within the eating disorder literature. Therefore, this study may draw attention to the importance of broadening the scope of research from the cause and effect relationship between eating pathology and the media’s preoccupation with thinness. It may be important for future inquiry to move away from this line of thinking altogether and explore thinness and the media’s promotion of this beauty ideal as a complex and multidimensional process. Just as there are a number of diverse factors contributing to the proliferation of eating disorders among women, the impact of sociocultural dimensions, particularly the mass media, also involves a dynamic interplay of elements.

My filtering of these image interpretations around my own experience and relationship to them through my eating pathology, has served as an alternate lens through which to examine this relationship. This approach allowed me to draw attention to the importance of women as active participants in the negotiation of the media images set before them. Seen as a complex dynamic, there may be a number of factors at play in the process
through which these ideals may or may not become internalized and upon which patterns of disturbed eating may be formed. Acknowledging women's agency in the process of negotiating media imagery and delving further into their responses to the various common sense conceptions of thinness within a diversity of media outlets, may be an important step in further expanding this important area of inquiry. The context within which women take up these representations may differ. In my own personal experience, my vision of femininity changed throughout, and in accordance with, the various stages of my eating pathology. As I consumed media images in two types of women's magazines, my perception of thinness as an ideal body image represented very different socially constructed notions of femininity. Thinness at the initial stages of my eating disorder expressed a passive notion of femininity which I believed would allow me to gain other elements such as success and popularity. My idealized image of thinness was attained through restrictive eating and, in many ways it seemed to involve less work because it required simply the elimination of select patterns of behaviour. I perceived the resulting body image as a passive construction of femininity epitomized by the types of images that I consumed within fashion magazines. Much later in my experience, thinness came to symbolize a notion of femininity based upon a reflection of power and control. I used fitness and exercise in combination with selective eating patterns as a way to become active in the manipulation of my body image. Through this, I sought to attain my ideal 'look' in a way which I felt, gave me more agency and control.

4.3 Suggestions For Future Research

This examination has looked at the conceptions of thinness and beauty within two types of women's magazines across a limited time frame. While
this research and the assertions within the study surrounding thinness as an ideal beauty standard may not be generalizable, this exploratory analysis of magazine content has raised several important areas of inquiry which may form the basis of subsequent research within this realm.

One of the most important ways in which this area of study may be further advanced is through the examination of a greater range of media material over a more extensive period. The women's magazines chosen for this analysis and the images selected within them, comprise a small part of the vast array of material that exists. Exploring a broader range of material and perhaps more diverse categories of publications, for example those targeting women of colour as readers and consumers, may draw attention to the existence and operation of alternative textual strategies in presenting variations of thinness as an idealized standard of beauty. Future analysis may also consider the extent to which this multiplicity of looks can be applied to the portrayal of the male body within the mass media. It has been suggested that the emergence of, and increasing focus on an ideal male body standard expressed within various media outlets has led to the increasing scrutiny of the male physique (Neimark, 1994:34). Is this representation a unidimensional image? Has the media constructed an ideal male body image that is similarly unattainable and unrealistic for most men to achieve? Are there variations in this cultural ideal? How do males interpret and negotiate these images in the process of identity construction? Is this process impacted by such factors as race, age or social class?

In exploring the mass media and the representation of thinness within magazine editorial and advertising material, this thesis has allowed me to incorporate my own experiences into the negotiation of these images. From the perspective of someone who has struggled with eating disorders, media
imagery has had a profound impact throughout the course of this problem. My pursuit of thinness has been influenced by my changing conceptions of what the thin body image signified to me in terms of a socially constructed notion of femininity. The incorporation of my own perspective within this analysis has proven invaluable in exploring how ideal notions of beauty may be negotiated. It has drawn attention to the importance of future research to examine the intended audience perception of the characterization of thinness within the media. How are the images of thinness conveyed within various media outlets, negotiated in the attainment of an idealized body image? How do race, class, age and sexual orientation enter into this process?

Addressing these issues on a personal level through methods that would allow the researcher to explore the actual impact of mass media images on women who develop eating disorders, would provide an invaluable contribution to the research and serve to further broaden the scope of the analysis. While it is important to recognize that a complex interplay of factors are at work in the onset and development of eating disorders, this thesis has drawn attention to the media’s role in the presentation of thinness as one important variable within this complicated relationship.
REFERENCES


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APPENDIX C