

Teal Pfeifer's Argument Essay (MLA Style)

<p>↓ 1"</p> <p>Teal Pfeifer Professor Rashad English 102 April 13, 2007</p>	<p>↓ 1/2"</p> <p>Pfeifer 1</p>	
	<p>Devastating Beauty</p>	<p>Title uses play on words to pique interest</p>
	<p>Collarbones, hipbones, cheekbones -- so many bones. She looks at the camera with sunken eyes, smiling, acting beautiful. Her dress is Versace, or Gucci, or Dior, and it is revealing, revealing every bone and joint in her thin, thin body. She looks fragile and beautiful, as if I could snap her in two. I look at her and feel the soft cushion of flesh that surrounds my own joints, my own shoulders and hips that are broad, my own ribs surrounded by skin and muscle and fat. I am not nearly as fragile or graceful or thin. I look away and wonder what kind of self-discipline it takes to become beautiful like the model in my magazine.</p>	<p>Opening uses emotional appeals and tries to establish common ground with readers</p>
	<p>By age seventeen a young woman has seen an average of 250,000 ads featuring a severely underweight woman whose body type is, for the most part, unattainable by any means, including extreme ones such as anorexia, bulimia, and drug use ("The Skinny"). The media promote clothing, cigarettes, fragrances, and even food with images like these. In a culture that has become increasingly visual, the images put out for public consumption feature women that are a smaller size than ever before. In 1950, the White Rock Mineral Water girl was 5'4" tall and weighed 140 pounds; now she is 5'10" tall and weighs only 110 pounds, signifying the growing deviation between the weight of models and that of the normal female population (Pipher 184).</p>	<p>Presents background information on the problem and cites sources</p>

↓ 1"

This media phenomenon has had a major effect on the female population as a whole, both young and old. Five to ten million women in America today suffer from an eating disorder related to poor self-image, and yet advertisements continue to prey on insecurities fueled by a woman's desire to be thin. Current estimates reveal that 80 percent of women are dissatisfied with their appearance and 45 percent of those are on a diet on any given day ("Statistics"). Yet even the most stringent dieting will generally fail to create the paper-thin body so valued in the media, and continuing efforts to do so can lead to serious psychological problems such as depression.

Introduces problem: — ads encourage women's poor body image

Good reason for thesis: stringent dieting can cause psychological problems

While many women express dissatisfaction with their bodies, they are not the only victims of the emaciated images so frequently presented to them. Young girls are equally affected by these images, if not more so. Eighty percent of girls under age ten have already been on a diet and expressed the desire to be thinner and more beautiful (*Slim Hopes*). Thus, from a young age, beauty is equated with a specific size. The message girls get is an insidious one: in order to be your best self, you should wear size 0 or 1. The pressure only grows more intense as girls grow up. According to results from the Kaiser Family Foundation Survey "Reflections of Girls in the Media," 16 percent of ten- to seventeen-year-old girls reported that they had dieted or exercised to look like a TV character. Yet two-thirds of teenage girls acknowledged that these thin characters were not an accurate reflection of "real life" (qtd. in Dittrich, "Children" pars. 2-3).

Provides statistical evidence that problem extends across age groups

Uses logical appeals —



Fig. 1. Young woman reading magazine.
Personal photograph by author.

It is tragic to see so much of the American population obsessed with weight and reaching an ideal that is, for the most part, ultimately unattainable. Equally troubling is the role magazines play in feeding this obsession. When a researcher asked female students from Stanford University to flip through several magazines containing images of glamorized, super-thin models (see Fig. 1), 68 percent of the women felt significantly worse about themselves after viewing the magazine models (qtd. in Dittrich, "Media" par. 16). Another study showed that looking at models on a long-term basis leads to stress, depression, guilt, and lowered self-worth (qtd. in Dittrich, "Media" par. 19). As Naomi Wolfe points out in *The Beauty Myth*, thinking obsessively about fat and dieting has actually been shown to change thought patterns and brain chemistry.

Good reason for thesis: magazines feed obsession with dieting

Backs up reasons with research and expert opinion

Considers and rejects alternative solutions

How do we reject images that are so harmful to the women and young girls who view them? Legislation regarding what can be printed and distributed is not an option because of First Amendment rights. Equally untenable is the idea of appealing to the industries that hire emaciated models. As long as the beauty and clothing industries are making a profit from the physically insecure girls and women who view their ads, nothing will change.

States working thesis: a boycott would effectively solve problem

What, however, might happen if those females stopped buying the magazines that print such destructive images? A boycott is the most effective way to rid the print medium of emaciated models and eliminate the harmful effects they cause. If women stopped buying magazines that target them with such harmful advertising, magazines would be forced to change the kinds of ads they print. Such a boycott would send a clear message: women and girls reject the victimization that takes place every time they look at a skeletally thin model and then feel worse about themselves. Consumers can ultimately control what is put on the market: if we don't buy, funding for such ads will dry up fast.

Good reason: boycotts have been effective

In the past, boycotts have been effective tools for social change. Rosa Parks, often identified as the mother of the modern-day civil rights movement, played a pivotal role in the Montgomery bus boycott in December 1955. When Parks refused to give up her seat to a white bus rider, she was arrested, and this incident inspired the boycott. For more than a year, the vast majority of African Americans in Montgomery chose to walk instead of ride the buses. Many of them were terrorized or harassed, but the boycott

Presents a precedent/example as evidence

was eventually successful: segregation on buses was declared illegal by the U.S. Supreme Court.

Between 1965 and 1973, Cesar Chavez also used boycotts successfully to change wage policies and working conditions for millions of Mexicans and Mexican Americans who were being exploited by growers of grapes and lettuce. In his boycott efforts, Chavez moved on two fronts simultaneously: he asked the workers to withhold their labor, and he asked consumers to refrain from purchasing table grapes (and later, lettuce) in order to show their support for the workers. In this situation, not only did the boycott force an industry to improve existing conditions, but it also made the public aware of pressing labor issues. Thus a bond was formed between the workers and the community their labor was benefiting.

Presents a second precedent/example as evidence

As a society, we have much to learn from boycotts of the past, and their lessons can help us confront contemporary social ills. As I have shown, body-image dissatisfaction and eating disorders are rising at an alarming rate among young girls and women in American society. This growing desire for an unrealistically thin body affects our minds and our spirits, especially when we are pummeled dozens of times a day with glamorized images of emaciated and unhealthy women. The resulting anorexia and bulimia that women suffer from are not only diseases that can be cured; they are also ones that can be prevented -- if women will take a solid stand against such advertisements and the magazines that publish them. While we are not the publishers or advertisers who choose the pictures of starving women represented in magazines, we are the ones who decide whether or not these images

Appeals directly to audience by using "we" in conclusion

Reinforces severity of problem and appeals to emotion

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Restates thesis as
a call to action

— will be purchased. This is where power lies -- in the hands of those who hand over the dollars that support the glorification of unhealthy and unrealistic bodies. It is our choice to exert this power and to reject magazines that promote such images.

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