

MAKING MEANING OF BODY-SIZE DIVERSITY IN MAGAZINES: A
GROUNDED THEORY ANALYSIS OF READER COMMENTS

Taylor Combs

Dr. Amanda Hinnant, Thesis Supervisor

ABSTRACT

Using grounded theory method, this research qualitatively analyzes more than 1000 reader comments left in reaction to an image of a plus-size model in *Glamour* magazine in 2009. The core categories that emerged through coding include the role social comparison had in how readers made sense of an image that was outside the thin ideal normally presented by magazines, the language commenters used to describe and talk about bodies and their perceived meanings, and readers' stated expectations for magazines. The core finding of this research is that in making sense of the body they were seeing on the pages of a magazines, readers drew comparisons to their own bodies. For some women, seeing a body that looked like their own for the first time in a magazine dramatically increased their stated affinity and loyalty to the publication. This research offers greater understanding of the role magazines play in shaping bodily expectations.