

# [The fit in with the beauty standards of](https://assignbuster.com/the-fit-in-with-the-beauty-standards-of/)

The purpose of this essay is to gain a betterunderstanding of how throughout history the male gaze has impacted the roles ofwomen, varying from different cultures and social backgrounds.

Illustration 1 created by Jacob Jordaens in 1653, titled Susanna and the Elders, has a much deeper story behind it. Two oldjudges threatened Susanna one day, whilst she bathed in the gardens. She wastold if she didn’t surrender herself to them, that they would accuse her ofadultery with a young man, a sentence that could result in death. EventuallySusanna was cleared by the help of Daniel and the two were exposed as criminals. This story is much favoured in the history of religious Art. (Wikipedia, 2017) “ Includedin the Book of Daniel featured in Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches” the story has been in many pieces of Art, perceiving the story in multipleways. Focusing on the theme of the male gaze, (Cartright& Sturken, 2009) has spoken about femininity and how social roles and stereotypeswere composed by men. “ Most collectors of art were men, and the primary viewingaudience of art was composed overwhelmingly of men.

” You can see in the imageof Susannah she looks like she is almost playing up to the male audience. Shehas also been illustrated to fit in with the beauty standards of that time, once again constructed by men, for men to look at. Another thing that standsout in the image is the way the woman communicates to the reader, predominantlya man looking at the image.

Used in advertisements to this day, particularlyfashion ones, where a woman gazes out to the audience.  (Cartright & Sturken, 2009). “ Ironically, this can have the effect of making the man in the picture appear to be a mereprop, with no agency.

“ This could be to make the man looking at the image tofeel connected to the woman, as if she is playing up to the male gaze andtending to his needs. Laura Mulvey (Cartright & Sturken, 2009) analysedHollywood cinema and how it, in face, plays up to the gaze, positioning womenin suggestive positions and situations. “ The term scopophilia refers topleasure in looking and exhibitionism- taking sexual pleasure in being lookedat.

” This could fit in well with the illustration of Susannah as painted bymales, they are trying to appeal to an audience that want to stare and enjoylooking at her body. Other illustrations in history have focused on thestory of Susannah and the Elders. Many artists showed Susannah as playing up tothe male gaze of the two elders and is often stood in a seductive manner as ifit shows that she is willingly inviting the attention. In ways such as combingher hair or admiring her reflection in the mirror. However, many of the artiststhroughout history were male and one female artist, Artemisia Gentileschi, stood out for a particular reason, as her illustrations depicted a differentSusannah. Rather than playing up to the attention, she twists away from themen, looking almost disgusted. I think the female view of the story is a verydifferent one as she shows that women do not enjoy the male gaze and ifanything, try to avoid it.

Obviously some other aspects come into play as ideasof beauty, attention and gender roles differed from culture to culture. AsJordaens was Dutch and Gentileschi was Italian, their genders may not have beenthe only influences on the male gaze and how women react to it.  Another theme linking to the illustration of Susannah and the Elders ishow we ourselves negotiate the meaning of an image. (Cartright & Sturken, 2009). “ For Saussure, signifier is the entity that represents, and sign is thecombination of the signifier and what it means.” The first image of Susannahseems as if she is being watched by two men whilst she bathes, however thedeeper meaning behind it would be the real story. The story plays on the ideaof a damsel in distress.

A young woman in need of help with a heroic man who comesto save her. A very cliché outlook, furthermore adds to how gender isconstructed throughout history and was deemed as the woman will always needsaving and the man will come to her aid.  Focusing on the social side of the image, the expectationsof beauty were entirely different in the 16th century.  A voluptuous figure was deemed attractivecompared to nowadays where there is a social stigma around being plus sized. The ideals of beauty also differed all around the World, as without technologythere was less communication and therefore less influence from “ role models” who today impact what is seen as beautiful.

This image originated from Belgiumand their culture idolized bigger women. Although women today may not want toappear this way, there are some aspects from 16th century culturethat influence them today. Corsets are still used to maintain a slim waist, whilst enhancing shape and figure. In conclusion, I think that the illustrations ofSusannah and the Elders, perfectly depicts the male gaze and how male artistswould promote and thrive off the idea of a woman being looked at. Throughouthistory, women have been the object and men have been the spectators. Thisforced women into roles of a stereotypical nature, such as sticking to thekitchen and serving their husbands needs.

Illustrations like these reinforcedthe gender roles and along with the male gaze, women were made to feel likethey had no other choice but to oblige. Today, these roles have somewhatdisappeared and along with Feminist movements, becoming more equal.