

## Women in the Media

By Michelle Corrao

The Psychological Power of the Media to Trap Women in A Role. The power of advertising to change, shape and mold the public's opinion has had a major impact on the lives of women. Women are the main target for many advertisements and are used in many forms of advertising. The media has historically used propaganda to define who women are and what they should be. The time period following WWII maybe one of the greatest examples of how completely media can control the ideas of the society on a specific group of people.

During WWII women were encouraged to go out to factories and work to support the war effort. This gave women a sense of need and belonging that many had been left out of before they had the opportunity to pursue any type of career in an acceptable manner. With the men away at war, women were encouraged to find work outside the home due to a lack of factory workers who could produce war goods. Once the war ended, however, this propaganda not only stopped- it abruptly changed.

Once the men were back in the states there was an excess of workers. Men came back from war to find that there were no jobs or that their wives were occupying them. With production plummeting after war time highs there were few jobs to offer the men returning home. This started a media blitz on women. Women were encouraged to return to the home and take care of their families. Women's magazines were overflowing with ideas on how to make a perfect wife and mother. It was obvious that if you weren't happy making your family your job, there was something wrong with you as a woman.

The problem was that women were unhappy; President Kennedy commissioned a report on the status of the American Woman due to the magnitude of this problem (Schneir 38-47). The report basically said that women were unhappy with the idea that they were fundamentally only responsible for being wives, mothers and homemakers; they had nothing they could associate as their own accomplishments. Alyssa's essay

Another study came out in 1963; it was called The Feminine Mystique by Betty Friedan. "What she detected was a concerted campaign since the end of WWII to convince American women they could achieve happiness in life only through marriage and motherhood-an ideology she labeled "the feminine mystique" (Schneir 48-9). Friedan's research also lead her to find an enormous amount of articles in women's magazines by supposed experts devoted to telling women that they should seek their fulfillment in being a wife and a mother. The fact that more women were going to college and becoming better educated only lead to more discontent and the idea of having courses on marriage and motherhood in college was brought up. If a woman was unhappy with her status she knew from what everything she read told her that something was wrong with her; she was not fulfilling her duty as a woman. [click here for more info](#)

The Influence of the Media on Women's View of Beauty and Self-Worth Another way in which the media has had a great influence over women is by controlling the image of what is beautiful for a woman in our society. The more technology that is created, the more unrealistic our ideas of the "perfect" woman become. "The body beautiful is a woman's responsibility and authority. She will be valued and rewarded on the basis of how close she comes to embodying the ideal. Whatever the current borders of beauty, they will always be well defined and exceedingly narrow, and it will be a woman's task to conform to them-for as long as humanly possible" (Chapkis 14). This leaves little room for interpretation to the idea of beauty. There is no flexibility in it; the media creates an image and women try to live up to it.

Women are forced to live within the constraints that the media puts on them because these constraints become societies "ideal." The media can even go so far as to pick a hair color that society will adopt as more desirable for themselves. One study showed that from 1950-1980's there was an inordinate amount of blondes

in advertisements and in magazines. Even Playboy portrays blondes as sexier. The study also showed that 84% of women think that men prefer blonde haired women, in reality only 35% of the men interviewed preferred blondes. This kind of distortion is something that the media perpetuates in the minds of women. It is important that women start to differentiate myth from fact when the media is concerned. Many disorders that women have when image is concerned come from trying to perpetuate a beauty myth inflected by the media. Media needs to be held accountable for the societal ideas that they are perpetuating. Until larger parameters are made for beauty, no one, not even the models can fit the "ideal."

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Works Cited Cash, Thomas F.. Sex Roles. "The American Image of Beauty :Media Representations of Hair Color for Four Decades." vol.29, 113-23, 1993. Chapkis, Wendy. beauty secrets. Southend Press, USA. copyright, 1986. Covell, Katherine and Kyra Lanis. Sex Roles. "Images of Women in Advertisements: Effects on Attitudes Related to Sexual Aggression." vol.32, 639-49, 1993. Schneir, Miriam. Feminism In Our Time. Vintage Original Press, N.Y.. copyright 1994.