

The Negative Impact of Advertising on females Body Image

The average woman today sees 400 to 600 advertisements per day causing a negative impact on how females view their bodies. Advertisers often emphasize sexuality and the importance of physical attractiveness in an attempt to sell products. But beneath selling a product is the pressure being placed upon women to focus on their appearance rather than buying a product. Advertisements may adversely impact women's body image which can lead to unhealthy behavior as women strive for an ultra-thin body idealized by the media. In a recent poll by People magazine, "80% of women reported that the images of women in advertisements make them feel insecure about their looks." (Gunter) The Negative portrayals of body images for women to obtain are apparent in Fashion magazines, Commercials and fitness magazines. Each source has evident content that promotes false perceptions that women strive to obtain by enduring in unhealthy lifestyles and creating psychological disorders.

Presently in society there is a variety of different fashion magazines that are full of endless pictures of stick-thin female bodies. Each picture has been airbrushed endlessly and enhanced digitally to create an unrealistic image. Everyday women read fashion magazines and feel that in order to be considered beautiful they must look identical to the models in the photographs; what female doesn't want to feel beautiful? However, models that grace the front covers of fashion magazines are below the healthy weight range. Nevertheless, the result is your average woman trying to emulate the images they see in the advertisements and the only way this becomes possible is by adapting an unhealthy lifestyle. A top fashion magazine today is, Vogue and inside of Vogue one will find numerous pages of content displaying dangerously thin models, modeling high fashion brand names. What is unseen to the naked eye is that most of these models are extremely unhealthy and have many disorders so they can be able to grace the front cover of a magazine. But societies just see the model and what is "beautiful" and associate the models looks with success, wealth and happiness and therefore all females from adolescents to adulthood feel that looking like a model will bring them success. I contacted, Sally Jones who is the marketing director of Vogue. I asked her a few important questions of whether or not the magazine feels as though they should be to blame for the negative disorders women have pertaining to their bodies. Sally stated that, "Vogue doesn't promote anything about how to look like the models or even mentions how beautiful the models are in fact the reason why they use models in their advertisements is beyond the actual magazine and relies within the fashion industry and the designers of the clothing." The magazines task is to promote the clothing and style and has nothing to do with the models. In spite of this, it still doesn't make sense why an average female can't grace the front cover of Vogue wearing the exact same clothing just in a "healthier" size? Sally would argue this again by saying, "advertisements in magazines aren't to blame it's the fashion industry." The skinny Victoria Secret's models featured in fashion magazines epitomize the fact that in today's society, thinness is associated with attracting male attention, success, wealth and status. At least this is the message portrayed indirectly by advertisers. Beauty standards created by advertisers are a means by which women judge and compare themselves. Unfortunately in most cases, the media tells most women that they are ordinary and their bodies need to be perfected. The number of fashion magazines being produced with dangerously thin models gracing the images inside has gone up and coincidentally

the rise of eating disorders amongst females has rose. In fact, "today's fashion models weigh 23% less than the average female, and a young woman between the ages of 18-34 has a 7% chance of being as slim as a catwalk model and a 1% chance of being as thin as a supermodel." (Kane) The more serious side of the fashion magazines representations of dangerously thin models is the extents and methods that women turn to in order to be "thin." Anorexia and Bulimia are very serious disorders that are affecting more and more women each year. Anorexia is an eating disorder where people starve themselves. Anorexia usually begins in young females around the onset of puberty. Individuals suffering from anorexia have extreme weight loss. "Weight loss is usually 15% below the person's normal body weight." (Kane) People suffering from anorexia are very skinny but are convinced that they are overweight.

Consequently, according to fashion magazines in order to be a front cover model you must be underweight which is why so many females are becoming anorexic. Bulimia is also a type of eating disorder. "A person with bulimia eats a lot of food in a short amount of time (binges) and then tries to prevent weight gain by getting rid of the food, called purging." (Straight)

Both of these disorders can be seen as a result from the inescapable images of flawless, perfect, thin females which make it hard for women to feel good about their bodies. The media creates illusions of flawlessness that appeal to women and through this exaggeration; women are lured into attaining false perfection by abusing their physical and emotional health. "In a recent study of nearly 10,000 girls aged 8-12, 17% induced vomiting or used laxatives or diet pills to lose weight. By the time girls reach adolescence, eating disorders are the third most common chronic illness afflicting them" (Straight). This is only one of the many negative effects media has on women today. Although advertising, the most powerful arm of the mass media, is all around us, many of us believe we are immune from its effects. This mistaken belief is one of the reasons it is so effective. Almost all commercial media aimed at women are supported by advertising revenue from the fashion, beauty, diet, and food industries, and their survival depends on their ability to please their sponsors. Magazine editors, in a fierce competition for readers, know that to make a sale, they need only play on our doubts or create new ones, making us think we have "problems" that don't really exist for example the headline in Cosmopolitans January 2007 issue read, ("What's He Really Thinking When He Sees You Naked?"). Every part of the female body is picked apart and scrutinized, with most articles telling us outright which products we should buy to fix or at least camouflage our numerous "flaws."

If being stick thin wasn't enough for women to attempt to obtain there is the inescapable amount of commercials with women who are thin but at the same time have huge breasts and are seen as the perfect appearance in order to catch the attention of males. "Through the repetition of negative connotative diction the advertisers create an impact on the reader's mind and brainwash women into believing their false claims." (Gunter) For example, the commercial about Trim Spa Ephedrine claims to have helped Anna Nicole Smith lose a lot of weight. Although in the commercial, she seems to be portrayed as Marilyn Monroe - a sex symbol during her time. The visual image that Anna creates is targeted toward teenage girls and women who desire to feel sexier, confident, and more appealing. The commercial toys with women's emotions and women fall into the trap of believing they can emulate Anna if they take this so-called diet pill. However, the disclaimers of the advertisement, in almost microscopic print state that "Trim Spa will only work with diet and exercise." (Shape) Which most consumers don't combine with the pill and just hope that they are buying some magic pill that will give them a lifestyle resembling Anna

Nicole Smith. The fact of the matter is that woman can't believe what they see in commercials, but women are constantly bombarded with commercials that suggest the same message making it hard not to believe. They fall prey to the media because they are discontented and end up hurting themselves when their bodies have to fight wars against eating disorders, depression and other illnesses. The sad reality is that it is only getting worse everyday. Beer commercials have been around for years and are consistent with sexual portrayals of tanned, blond, large breasted women who are wearing next to nothing and promoting beer. The degrading sex symbol manner that these women are being portrayed as has a negative effect on all female society. "For far too long, beer companies like Coors have discriminated against women who are not pretty, blonde, and stupid." (Dougle) Women today are inclined to resemble the women seen in commercials in order for guys to like them. "Cosmetic surgery is the fastest growing 'medical' specialty, throughout the 80's as women gained power, unprecedented number of them sought out and submitted to the knife." (Wolf) In order to achieve the bodies portrayed in the commercials females must now undergo surgery to achieve larger breasts. Breast implants and liposuction are now bestowed by parents as graduation or birthday gifts for their daughters. "Some doctors say they have performed breast augmentations on baby-boomer mothers and their teenage daughters." (Gunter) The effect of these commercials promoting an unattainable look is effecting females young and old and resulting in them enduring dangerous procedures just to achieve a certain look that isn't reality.

Fitness Magazines are also to blame for the negative effect advertising has on females body images. There are a variety of fitness magazines on the market today from body building to basic diet and fitness. Shape, is a number one diet and fitness magazine that women subscribe to internationally today. When looking through the pages of the January 2007 issue of Shape; I was shocked to see women who still had an unrealistic body in the photographs. The front cover model was extremely thin and the only difference between the fitness model and the fashion model was the fitness model had a six pack for abs. Once again the average female in society is faced with the vision that in order to be in shape, a person must have a ripped stomach. Again, this physical attribute is unattainable for many females, no matter how hard they try some bodies don't produce the muscle mass needed to formulate abs. Consequently, women are now turning to diet pills and extreme diets in order to be "thin" but at the same time are in "shape". The diet market is full of ideas and trends that women who seek again an "ideal" body try. The Atkins diet was extremely popular because of how it was portrayed in the media. Celebrities raved about the new diet and books and magazines were being published with information on how to be on Atkins. The amount of advertising that went into promoting the diet made it hard for anyone to not want to give it a try. In spite of the initial popularity of the diet the positive advertising hit the rocks the diet soon faded away. Isn't it questionable to point out that as soon as advertising stops promoting this image or idea, society stops complete interest into it?

Dangerously thin, large breasts and a six pack of abs is what the advertisements are suggesting is beautiful and in reality all three aren't natural and aren't characteristics of how the female body should look. Media and advertising companies only have one goal in mind which is to gain profits. The unrealistic body images created as a commodity by these companies have given women false hope and created physical and emotional illnesses. Whether it is through fashion magazines, commercials or fitness magazines this negative portrayal is hindering female's body image to dangerous effects. Is it really worth obsessing about one's weight or looks

when true beauty originates from deep within ourselves? Realizing the importance of one's inner self and staying well nourished will bring much joy and peace of mind. It will drive us with the power to rise above societal pressures and let the true meaning of beauty live on through our actions and not through the negative images seen in advertising.