

Regulating Advertisements and Promoting Media Literacy

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Magazine advertisements show a perception of female beauty as skinny, tall, sexy and overall flawless. The advertisements published go through photo manipulation, a digital alteration of an image. The enhanced photos give society an image of perfection that is impossible to attain. It causes people to sometimes take desperate measures to look like the image in a photo they do not know is fake. Media stresses such an importance on beauty and perfection that it provokes negative body image, especially in females. Regulations on advertisements to keep them realistic and honest, and to provide media-literacy on edited photos can help to reverse the negative effects that society is experiencing and help them trust the credibility of photographs in the media again.

An Introduction to Media Effects on Body Perception

Poor female body image, due to advertisement influence, is a growing problem in today's society. With all the media outlets available today, messages circulate to larger audiences. The constant bombardment of the Photoshopped, degraded, sexualized images in media culture have hurt women's self esteem. Diet products, exercise regimes, and plastic surgery are all offered to society to help reach this goal of "beauty", though it is not real (Coffaney, 2011). Magazine ads provide an image of perfection that we should look like, tells women products can achieve this look (though false), and some women are then negatively affected with poor perceptions of themselves because they cannot look like this. In the end media is serving false and attainable images because they have found means to fix flaws.

Photoshop, or photo manipulation is altering an image through analog/digital software to create an illusion or deception (Coffaney, 2011). The advancement of technology in camera equipment and digital editing software have progressed so far that no published photo really goes unedited (Coffaney, 2011). For art pieces, the extensive use of Photoshop can be acceptable. The artist is purposely making changes for the final product and the audience viewing the composition knows it is as a piece of imagination (Coffaney, 2011). A composition for the sole purpose of art, however, is different from advertising photos in the media such as newspaper, news stations, and magazines. Some audiences see those outlets as reliable sources. Noticing images that are manipulated or original images leaked to the public might break the trust of the audiences. They may feel like they are being deceived.

The Problems Photo Manipulation Causes for Society

In today's society, close to 80% of American women are dissatisfied with their bodies (Fallon, 2005). Poor perception of one's body has become a social epidemic due to the advancement of media culture and technology. Researches studying female body image and the ideal female physique stated that, "body image disturbance is a main risk factor for the development of eating disorders" (Fallon, 2005). As of several years ago, 10 million females in the United States alone are fighting anorexia and bulimia. Millions more suffer with binge disorders (*Get the Facts*, 2010).

Dieting is a constant thought for most females. They fear becoming obese and that fear drives unhealthy behavior to try and achieve what young women think the "perfect body" shown in media is. Of adolescent girls, 35% to 57% engage in "crash dieting, fasting, self-induced vomiting, diet pills, or laxatives" (*Get the Facts*, 2010). Poor body image begins around the age

6-8. Dieting begins at ages 9-14, percentage increasing as the age does. What starts off as “normal dieting behaviors” can spiral into full-fledged eating disorders (Fallon, 2005).

Studies suggest that these numbers have risen part because of the manipulated images seen in the media. A research experiment investigated the exposure of “beautiful and thin” images to 123 college women. Knowledge of the photo manipulation before being exposed to the media images proved to prevent negative body perception in the females (Yamamiya, 2005, p.1).

A Solution to Society’s Thoughts on Photo Manipulation in Advertisements

The way to help boost positive body image in females is through regulations in magazine advertisements and promoting media literacy so negative influences can become less of a problem.

The United Kingdom has an organization called the Advertising Standards Authority (*Our Mission*, 2013). It is not funded by the British Government, but by a levy on advertising industries (*Our Mission*, 2013). It works as an acting group that regulates advertisements in the different outlets of the media to keep it “legal, decent, honest and truthful, to benefit consumers, business and society” (*Our Mission*, 2013). In 2011, ads from makeup companies L’Oréal, Lancôme, and Maybelline were banned for exaggerating what the products could actually do and being misleading. The organization banned them from future publications (*Annual Report*, 2011).

An advertisement regulation committee should be created in the United States, especially because America has been one of the greatest sources of pressure toward “beauty” in magazine advertisements (Campbell, Martin, Fabos. 2013). With this organization at work allowing honest images into the public and marking manipulated images as altered, the exaggerated perceptions of unattainable beauty will no longer be bombarding society.

Learning media literacy, the ability to read the media, can be a useful tool that may promote healthy body image. Women will be able to see the motivations and techniques in the media and may not fall victim to negative mind-sets. This solution could be incorporated into middle school and high school health curriculums around the United States or mandatory workshops in school by local health centers and organizations. They will learn to ask questions such as:

- Who created this message?
- What commercial purpose does it have?
- Why did they create it?
- How will different people see this and how influential can it be?
- What techniques are being used and what manipulations are present?

Conclusions:

If young women are continuously exposed to magazine advertisements with a specific perception of beauty, a compilation of skinny, tall, sexy, perfect women, then that will become their only definition of what is acceptable to look like. This beauty is unattainable because the advertisements published go through digital altercations to look flawless. Some of the women may try and attain this look because of the importance that media stresses on beauty. (Campbell, Martin, Fabos. 2013). The creation of an advertisement regulation committee to keep the images realistic and honest, and to promote media literacy can help to reverse the negative effects that society is experiencing.

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