

Advertisements in Women's Magazine's: Harmful or Harmless?

Cosmopolitan, Glamour, Self, and Elle are just a few of the largest-selling young women's magazines in the world today. These magazines have been around for decades, and for many teenagers and women these are magazines read on an everyday basis. Each one of these magazines has its own style, personality, and message that they are trying to perceive, however, the one thing they all have in common is their form of harmful advertising to society's young women.

How they get that perfect body is a question to all of us women. Is it because of a certain diet or exercise they are doing? We come across magazine ads, billboards and even TV commercials everyday. Not once do we ever come across an ad that doesn't depict our mind of how we are supposed to look or act. Unfortunately, women and teenage girls never stop and think about how these images are deceitful. These images are often enhanced by computers to make the models' legs, face, and other body parts more attractive by removing any flaws that the photographer may find. They sometimes even use different parts from photos of other women to generate the perfect image (Katz, Teresa, 2000., para. 6).

Although in contrast some TV commercials, such as Dove, are now trying to portray a different outlook on how the women of today should feel about the way they look. They are to show their "Real Beauty", the beauty that is unique to them, because each woman is an individual. Dove commercials use a more "average" woman just to show off their curvaceous figure without making any adjustments to improve their imperfections. "When conducting an interview with Joe Kennedy from the Roanoke Times he expresses he likes to see accuracy, but he also realizes that glamour has never

been built upon people who look like most of us,” so with that said hopefully dove’s new campaign will show him the accuracy he has been looking for (Kennedy, interview, December 7, 2005). In my point of view, this is a major step toward increasing the self-esteem of today’s women which helps them to regain control of their lives by being able to focus on more important things than their appearance (Neff, Jack., para 6).

In an article I read, contrasting and comparing the differences and similarities between a few different magazines such as Teen Vogue and Seventeen, many are still running ads and even columns that talk about ways to improve upon the image of young women. Bloussant, a breast enhancement cream that helps to increase the size of the consumer’s breast, is just one example of the type of ads shown in present teen magazines. These types of advertisements and editorials have caused young girls to become more conscious of their appearance, which causes a downward spiral on their self-perception of their body. As for other magazines such as Elle and YM, which are becoming more aware that ads such as the one from Bloussant is causing an effect on their readers, realize they may result in extreme levels of depression and eating disorders. Elle and YM have come together and have worked to completely remove all ads that have potential causes to their young readers (Kuczynski, Alex, 2001., intro., para.1). When comparing Teen Vogue and Seventeen to YM and Elle, in my opinion, Teen Vogue and Seventeen are more into making sales and increasing profit rather than helping their consumers to increase self-esteem, whereas YM and Elle are trying to increase profit and sales by making the consumer feel better about the way they are.

Many of the ads in today’s magazines are contradicting. For instance, a magazine may print an article that expresses how women today should be proud of their

individuality and how they should show off their curvaceous bodies, but then flip to the next page and there is an ad right in front of your face on some special diet pill that shows the before and after pictures of a person who has taken the pill. This type of ad automatically draws us in and wants us to be able to achieve the same “after” look as the person in the ad. These ads cause us to make bad judgments, which indeed can result to extreme measures such as dieting which may also lead to dangerous eating disorders.

“In 2003, Teen magazine reported that 35 percent of girls 6 to 12 years old have been on at least one diet, and that 50 to 70 percent of normal weight girls believe they are overweight” (Media Awareness Network, n.d., para.4). When determining the accuracy and completeness of this information, not every young little girl at that age has considered being on a diet, and that not every average girl feels overweight.

Although many women in today’s world are overwhelmed and manipulated to think that every diet they try and certain exercises will help them achieve their ideal body image, they also believe that they will be able to achieve that unreachable look of their favorite model or celebrity they look up too on the cover of their favorite magazine.

The standard of women’s ideal body image is consistently increasing. But is it because of the advertisements in the magazines? “Researchers report that women’s magazines have ten and one-half times more ads and articles promoting weight loss...and three-quarters of the covers of the women’s magazines include at least one message about how to change a women’s bodily appearance- by diet, exercise, or cosmetic surgery” (Media Awareness Network, n.d., para. 8). Women see these types of ads and magazines everyday at least once during their day. They are constantly reminded either directly or indirectly how they should look in order to feel sexy or wanted by the opposite sex.

“In the United States, the ‘conservative estimates’ indicate that after puberty, 5-10% of girls and women are struggling with eating disorders. That translates to *5-10 million* girls and women! Out of that 5-10 million, at least 50,000 will die, and that’s not including the number of cases not reported due to the shame and secretiveness associated with the disease” (Van Nostrand , Janine., n.d., para.1). Anorexia Nervosa and Bulimia are two of the most common forms of eating disorders among young women today (Teen Health., 2005., para.3), but are magazine advertisements really the cause of the disorder? When making inferences on the facts I have encountered, I believe they aren’t the sole reason for these disorders but are in fact one of many causes. Advertisements can effect just about anyone in one way or another, but it’s only the strong willed that survive the stereotypes such as “Thin is in.” Women, who have adjusted their entire life to becoming nothing but thin, fit into the category of a low self-esteem woman who will be influenced by all the ads in the magazines and will add to our statistics.

After identifying and evaluating sources’ bias, I do realize that advertising is how these popular magazines do still exist in today’s society, and by advertising in the media is how they make a profit for their business, but does the topic of bodyweight and overall appearance have to completely invade today’s magazine ads just to make money? This question is an open-ended question that has no right or wrong answer. Therefore, when drawing my conclusions whether or not Women’s magazines are harmful or harmless, I still believe they may cause a threat to our mental ability to accept our own personal image. Although knowing advertisements are digitally enhanced, our mind plays tricks on us and still makes us see in the mirror a woman who doesn’t meet today’s society’s standards.

Endnotes

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Interview profile:

Danielle Jones, December 7, 2005, Course # 101

Joe Kennedy, Column Writer

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Interviewed online through e-mail, December 6, 2005

Joe Kennedy is a very opinionated writer for the Roanoke Times, which caught my attention right away when I was researching to find a journalist to interview. When I e-mailed him to ask if I could interview him and how he would like to go about it if he agreed, he was more than happy to help me out. He has a teenage daughter so he had an opinion on my topic which helped him out with his responses. He helped me complete my paper with good ideas, which helped me look at women's magazines, and body image in a different aspect.

Joe Kennedy was a very easy writer to interview, although it was through e-mail, he was very descriptive and had well-thought out answers. He got his point across and his main point was that women go to far to rich unrealistic goals for their body types that don't allow their genes to reach, but the women will go as far as possible to get that perfect body. So basically, he, just as many other newspaper journalists, he doesn't agree with how women's magazine and billboards and even catalogs publicize their ads, but he also tried not to put them down for doing their job.