

Cosmetics: Facts And Figures

Cosmetics & Media Literacy

Some Facts & Figures

More money is spent on beauty products in the United States annually than on education: over \$6 billion on makeup alone. Source: text In Your Face: The Culture of Beauty & You

<http://www.girlsinc.com/ic/page.php?id=3.1.12>

In a 1999 study, more than three-quarters of the twelve most popular women's magazines (78 percent) had messages on the cover about diet, exercise, or cosmetic surgery.⁹

9. Malkin, Amy., et al. (1999). Women and weight: Gendered messages on magazine covers. Sex Roles, 40(7/8), 647–655.

An analysis of the four most popular magazines for girls found that these magazines were more likely to include feature articles about beauty and fashion than about physical or mental health. Seventeen magazine³, the most popular of the four⁷, was 22 times more likely to run an article about beauty or fashion than about physical or mental health (66 percent vs. 3 percent).³

3. Curie, Dawn. (1999). Girl talk: Adolescent magazines and their readers. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.

A study of over 500 girls in grades 5 through 12 in the Boston area found that girls who frequently read women's fashion magazines are more likely than girls who rarely read magazines of this type to say that they "have dieted to lose weight because of a magazine article" (22 percent vs. 13 percent), to say that "pictures in magazines make them want to lose weight" (57 percent vs. 41 percent) and to say that "pictures in magazines influence their idea of a perfect body shape" (79 percent vs. 59 percent).⁵

5. Field, Alison, et al. (1999). Exposure to the mass media and weight concerns among girls. *Pediatrics*, 103(3), e36f.

For example, did you know the average person in the United States sees approximately 3,000 ads in magazines, billboards, and on television every day? Studies show that girls who regularly read magazines tend to diet and base their body image on photos and messages they find in the ads of these magazines. In fact, many young girls feel they must look like the images in magazines in order to be considered beautiful or to be accepted by others. When you stop and think about the fact that the average height and weight for a model is 5'10" and 110 lbs and the height and weight for the average woman is 5'4" and 145 lbs, it's easy to see why this creates a tremendous health risk for young girls. Media targeting Latina girls are emphasizing the ideal of thinness as beauty. This great disparity can lead girls to diet or exercise excessively or binge and purge in order to meet their perceived ideals.

<http://www.soyunica.gov/adults/new/medialit.aspx>

BODY IMAGE & ADVERTISING

Advertisers often emphasize sexuality and the importance of physical attractiveness in an attempt to sell products, 1 but researchers are concerned that this places undue pressure on women and men to focus on their appearance. In recent survey by Teen People magazine, 27% of the girls felt that the media pressures them to have a perfect body, 2 and a poll conducted in 1996 by the international ad agency Saatchi and Saatchi found that ads made women fear being unattractive or old. 3 Researchers suggest advertising media may adversely impact women's body image, which can lead to unhealthy behavior as women and girls strive for the ultra-thin body idealized by the media. Advertising images have also been recently accused

of setting unrealistic ideals for males, and men and boys are beginning to risk their health to achieve the well-built media standard.

The Beautiful Message

The average woman sees 400 to 600 advertisements per day, 4 and by the time she is 17 years old, she has received over 250,000 commercial messages through the media. 5 Only 9% of commercials have a direct statement about beauty, 6 but many more implicitly emphasize the importance of beauty—particularly those that target women and girls. One study of Saturday morning toy commercials found that 50% of commercials aimed at girls spoke about physical attractiveness, while none of the commercials aimed at boys referred to appearance.⁷ Other studies found 50% of advertisements in teen girl magazines and 56% of television commercials aimed at female viewers used beauty as a product appeal. 8 This constant exposure to female-oriented advertisements may influence girls to become self-conscious about their bodies and to obsess over their physical appearance as a measure of their worth. 9

A Thin Ideal

Advertisements emphasize thinness as a standard for female beauty, and the bodies idealized in the media are frequently atypical of normal, healthy women. In fact, today's fashion models weigh 23% less than the average female, 10 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. 11 However, 69% of girls in one study said that magazine models influence their idea of the perfect body shape, 12 and the pervasive acceptance of this unrealistic body type creates an impractical standard for the majority of women.

Some researchers believe that advertisers purposely normalize unrealistically thin bodies, in order to create an unattainable desire that can drive product consumption. 13

"The media markets desire. And by reproducing ideals that are absurdly out of line with what real bodies really do look like...the media perpetuates a market for frustration and disappointment. Its customers will never disappear," writes Paul Hamburg, an assistant professor of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School. 14 Considering that the diet industry alone generates \$33 billion in revenue, 15 advertisers have been successful with their marketing strategy.

Advertising's Impact

Women frequently compare their bodies to those they see around them, and researchers have found that exposure to idealized body images lowers women's satisfaction with their own attractiveness. 16 One study found that people who were shown slides of thin models had lower self-evaluations than people who had seen average and oversized models, 17 and girls reported in a Body Image Survey that "very thin" models made them feel insecure about themselves. 18 In a sample of Stanford undergraduate and graduate students, 68% felt worse about their own appearance after looking through women's magazines. 19 Many health professionals are also concerned by the prevalence of distorted body image among women, which may be fostered by their constant self-comparison to extremely thin figures promoted in the media. Seventy-five percent (75%) of "normal" weight women think they are overweight 20 and 90% of women overestimate their body size. 21

Dissatisfaction with their bodies causes many women and girls to strive for the thin ideal. The number one wish for girls ages 11 to 17 is to be thinner, 22 and girls as young as five have expressed fears of getting fat. 23 Eighty percent (80%) of 10-year-old girls have dieted, 24 and at any one time, 50% of American women are currently dieting. 25 Some researchers suggest depicting thin models may lead girls into unhealthy weight-control habits, 26 because the ideal they seek to emulate is unattainable for many and unhealthy for most. One study found that 47% of the girls were influenced by magazine

pictures to want to lose weight, but only 29% were actually overweight. 27 Research has also found that stringent dieting to achieve an ideal figure can play a key role in triggering eating disorders. 28 Other researchers believe depicting thin models appears not to have long-term negative effects on most adolescent women, but they do agree it affects girls who already have body-image problems. 29 Girls who were already dissatisfied with their bodies showed more dieting, anxiety, and bulimic symptoms after prolonged exposure to fashion and advertising images in a teen girl magazine. 30 Studies also show that a third of American women in their teens and twenties begin smoking cigarettes in order to help control their appetite. 31

Boys and Body Image

Although distorted body image has widely been known to affect women and girls, there is growing awareness regarding the pressure men and boys are under to appear muscular. Many males are becoming insecure about their physical appearance as advertising and other media images raise the standard and idealize well-built men. Researchers are concerned about how this impacts men and boys, and have seen an alarming increase in obsessive weight training and the use of anabolic steroids and dietary supplements that promise bigger muscles or more stamina for lifting. 32 One study suggests that an alarming trend in toy action figures' increasing muscularity is setting unrealistic ideals for boys much in the same way Barbie dolls have been accused of giving an unrealistic ideal of thinness for girls. 33 "Our society's worship of muscularity may cause increasing numbers of men to develop pathological shame about their bodies... Our observations of these little plastic toys have stimulated us to explore further links between cultural messages, body image disorders and use of steroids and other drugs," says researcher Dr. Harrison Pope. 34

The majority of teenagers with eating disorders are girls (90%), 35 but experts believe the number of boys affected is

increasing and that many cases may not be reported, since males are reluctant to acknowledge any illness primarily associated with females. 36 Studies have also found that boys, like girls, may turn to smoking to help them lose weight. Boys ages 9 to 14 who thought they were overweight were 65% more likely to think about or try smoking than their peers, and boys who worked out every day in order to lose weight were twice as likely to experiment with tobacco. 37

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