

# Media's views on women

[Health & Medicine](#), [Beauty](#)



In the twenty-first century women have become one of the most targeted groups in advertising. Women's magazines, often referred to as the "glossy bible" are infested with ads trying to sell women their product or idea. On average, when flipping through a magazine a woman or girl would see ads for cosmetic surgery, makeup, wedding dresses, perfume, diets, home cleaning products, jewelry and the list goes on. Women are also affected by the flawless, airbrushed and idealized models who are in these ads. How women are portrayed in magazine advertisements affects how women are thought to portray themselves, and because of this "idealized woman" women have had plastic surgery, worn colored contacts, developed eating disorders and have tried to change their appearance in order to fit into the norms that they have heard, seen or read every day. Beauty culture developed in America as a commercial venture and social religion in the late nineteenth century and became a mass consumer industry after World War I. In previous years, only a handful of small businesses dispensed minimal beauty goods and services, mainly to upper class Americans. "Victorian gender ideology taught the middle class that beauty was the duty of white middle-class women, while fashion plates and such women's magazines as Godey's Ladies Book depicted idealized female images. Much of the prescriptive literature of the period, however, decried external and artificial beauty, preferring instead to encourage cleanliness and moral living as keys to better appearance."() By the middle of the 1880s a group of businesses such as, chemists, perfumers, beauty salons, drugstores, and department stores, began to inaugurate a "profit-making infrastructure for new notions of beauty." At first abandoning makeup as a hoax for "natural" methods, but

after World War I the blossoming cosmetics industry promoted rouge lips, face powder, and eye pencils as "necessary artifice." Its governing message was that every woman could achieve beauty, no matter their class or age. By the 1920s many women had adopted beauty culture as a part of modernity. They believed that an aesthetically pleasing appearance was essential in the job market. "New dating patterns, mixed-sex leisure, and companionate marriage reinforced the advertisers' messages."() Immigrant and second-generation women frequently turned to beauty culture as a way to represent themselves as "American". In the post-World War II period, the beauty industry greatly increased their marketed products to young girls and teenage girls. These girls were then trained by schools, clubs, and mass-circulation magazines on grooming and makeup applications; they were taught that beautifying was necessary to acquire femininity and a pleasing sexual image. "Revlon's famous "Fire and Ice" advertising campaign of 1952, featuring a sophisticated and sensual woman, marked a turning point in cosmetics advertising. The magazine was one of the fastest growing commodities in Victorian Britain, with about 12, 500 titles appearing between 1824 and 1900. When Victoria came to the throne in 1837 the number of women's magazines was increasing rapidly as the mass market itself grew and diversified. Consumer culture was on the rise, and central to that were the commodities on sale."() Many social and cultural historians believe that the commodity as a spectacle pervaded the entire Victorian social system. Women's magazines, with their lavish images, became spectacles in themselves. "An interest in and celebration of fashion was something that all commercial magazines shared and even the non-commercial titles, such

as those devoted to reform issues, covered fashion (constructed as so important to women's lives), if only to critique its pervasive and pernicious influence."() In the past thirty years advertising in every shape and form has reached new and daring heights, to the point where as a culture we are banal to the shocking images trespassing into every nook and cranny surrounding our daily lives. Women in particular are bombarded with thousands of images a day, most of which convey subliminal messages of sex, violence, glamour, success, and body image. The hundreds of different (but similar) women's magazines that have been devoured by teen-age girls and women since the 1950s, have played a huge role in influencing women to want to be that model, selling that product, in that magazine ad. If one was to examine magazines from fifty years ago in the 1950's, they would notice an immense radical change in the subliminal content within the advertisements of today's magazines. For example, in a Tide magazine advertisement of the 1950s, two women neighbors are depicted hanging laundry outside while chatting. One woman is wearing an apron, the other holding up a man's plaid shirt. The message this advertisement is sending to females, is that women take care of the household chores and men take care of the finances. In another advertisement (also in a 1950's magazine, by Palmolive) an elated woman is embraced by a handsome man from behind. The slogan: " Let your beauty be seen...Palmolive brings out beauty", suggests that if you use Palmolive soap, then you'll be beautiful and attract the opposite sex. The positioning of the man embracing the woman from behind illustrates the governing male dominance in the majority of advertising. In the 1950's the majority of magazine advertisements usually

demonstrated the dominance of males, and the submissiveness of females. In the 1980's magazine advertisers became quite daring and their ads became quite racy. In an advertisement by Wrangler Jeans a woman and a man are playing a game of pool in a dim inside environment. The woman covers the majority of the foreground while the man is sunk into the background. The woman stands with her back to the viewer, exhibiting her buttocks in skin-tight jeans. She also stands with her legs spread apart and holds a pool cue, which rests slightly between her legs. The pool cue is a phallic symbol for male genitalia, which she holds in her hands. This advertisement is sexually explicit and suggests to the viewer that if they wear a pair of tight-fitting wrangler jeans, they will attract more of the opposite sex. Also, the slogan: " Live life to the limit in Wrangler", combined with the image of the woman winning the pool game implies feminine control. Since the rise of feminism in the 1960s and 70s, advertisers had to present women with more control and freedom in order to sell more of their product. Later, in the 1980s, another ad for Dim panty hose, presents a young woman sitting on a bean-bag chair in a dance studio. Her pose is evocative of someone experiencing an orgasm, which is indicated by her legs spread apart, her weight held up by one arm, her head tilted back and her eyes closed. By the late 1990s, advertisers had been using sex to sell their products to women for decades. However, women over the years had become so numb to seeing the same sexual imagery, that they didn't notice when the ideas and subliminal messages from advertisements became apart of their everyday life. Therefore, these ads lost their shock value, and advertisers had to yet again find another way to stand out and get noticed.

An advertisement for Big Red chewing gum, found a new way to grab ones' attention by suggesting sexual innuendo between a young man and woman in a pub. The man relaxes back onto a bench seat and the braless woman sits on her knees, while she happily looks down and holds her crotch. The slogan: " We know what you're thinking. Here's what you should be chewing." insinuates that the two should be chewing on something other than chewing gum. Another magazine ad by Chanel Beauty advertises their new shades of lipstick illustrating a flawless, airbrushed model biting a tube of lipstick between her teeth. Her head is tilted back and her eyes are closed. The positioning of the model's hand holding the cap is a sexual gesture, as most " lipstick ads often use the lipstick as a phallic symbol to represent oral or anal sex." (prov26) " Ads try to tell [women] who [they] are and who [they] should be." They tell women that they are the care takers of the household chores, that they are beautiful if they wear makeup, that they are sexy if they wear tight clothing and that they are worthless unless they present them selves to feed the male appetite. to(prov12) " Eighty-one percent of magazine ads for appearance related products, such as cosmetics, clothing and toiletries feature young, beautiful and sexy women. However, " many times, even these " beautiful" women are deemed not good enough for advertisements. Photographs are airbrushed or otherwise altered to remove any lines, bumps, or lumps - anything less than " perfection." If the ideal of beauty is physically unattainable, then consumers will never be able to attain the image they want, and therefore there will be an endless demand for new beauty products.(www. socialistalternative. org) (jessica moore) In a study, by the American Academy of pediatrics called the

Exposure to the Mass Media and Weight Concerns among Girls, the authors used: " A cross-sectional survey of 548 girls in 5th grade through 12th grade to assess influence of the media on weight concerns, weight control behaviors and perceptions of body weight and shape. A majority of girls (59 percent) reported dissatisfaction with their body shape, and 66 percent expressed the desire to lose weight; the prevalence of overweight in this study was 29 percent. Girls were asked about their frequency of reading women's fashion magazines. Some 69 percent reported that appearance of models in the magazines influenced their image of a perfect female body, and 47 percent desired to lose weight because of the magazine pictures. Frequent readers of women's fashion magazines (2 times a week to 7 times a week) were more likely to have dieted or exercised to lose weight because of a magazine article." (www. aap. org) Teenage girls and women have become obsessed with dieting and body image because the ideal or perfect woman has been drilled into their subconscious by the unrealistic representations in magazine advertising. These magazine advertisements " encourage not only fat free diets but liposuction, anorexia, bulimia, binge eating, cosmetic surgery and dentistry. Who gains by promoting this nonsensical image of the ideal woman? Cosmetic surgery is a three hundred billion dollar industry. The diet industry rakes in thirty-three million per year, cosmetics, twenty billion."(prov56) " Advertising is not a new type of lie. Today's women with ultra thin figures or breast implants are merely the contemporary version of females over the centuries that have mangled themselves in the name of feminine sex appeal. ( )prov 56) As far back as ancient China, women had gone through painful and severe practices of foot

binding, where their bones were broken and bound until their feet fit into a pair of shoes no bigger than a baby's. Shockingly, this was considered the epitome of femininity and the only basis for getting a good husband. In the 1800s women wore corsets which deformed their internal organs making it impossible for them to draw deep breaths, in or out of a corset. Because of this, Victorian women were always fainting. Men believed that all women with small waists were beautiful, and the higher up in class a woman was, the tighter the corset. The idea of the corset also became popular by way of the fashion plate (a ladies pocket magazine) which depicted sumptuous images of upper class women advertising a tiny waist line. It is unnerving to learn of these events in past cultures, especially since the American culture is still carrying on these traditions of beauty culture.