

Body image in the media

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Body Image By: Jennifer E-mail: jennerjohnston@hotmail. com Body Image Portrayed by the Media Through the use of imagery, the display of life-styles, and the reinforcement of values, advertisements are communicators of culturally defined concepts such as success, worth, love, sexuality, popularity, and normalcy. Of particular concern over the past two decades has been excessive use of sexual stereotypes, especially of women. Women are directly affected by this advertising, beyond the mere desire to purchase the product or service described. The influence of the media on people is tremendous, and the effect of advertisements that direct images of beauty, and the perfect slim figure have a harmful effect on a great deal of the world's population, especially women. The media has portrayed the " perfect body image" so successfully, that women's self-image, self-esteem and even their health is affected. Looking at the media, it's almost impossible to ignore the many images of thin, beautiful women. In many women's magazines, nearly every other page is covered with an advertisement that displays a person with the " ideal body", a slim figure, a happy face, and trendy or chic clothes. Most of the advertisements in magazines try to present models as realistic representations for consumers, particularly women, to compare themselves. Not only do magazines try to portray the " perfect image," but also television advertisements try to achieve this representation of the perfect body. Television broadcasts events and shows like " Miss America," and " Baywatch" that represent unrealistic body types for ordinary women. To accomplish the goal of looking like the models being displayed all over the media, women think they need to diet. If it was dieting just for the fact of making women feel better, it would be all right, but the purpose of most

people is different. When women compare themselves to models and pictures of people in advertisements, they believe the only way they will get noticed is if they also appear the in the same image of the models. To achieve this goal, they begin to starve themselves. They start to believe that by eating anything at all they will get fat and the most important thing to them is not to be fat. It becomes a compulsion to become thin and some women will do anything to get there. Women need to realize that what the media displays as the " perfect body" and what really is the healthy body are two different things. Even if a woman does get down to the smallest size, does this mean she will be happy? Looking like a model doesn't necessarily mean women will feel like the models feel. Media brings out the conception that women will look and feel like the models. Media makes women feel bad about themselves and it is because of what is being displayed in the media that exemplifies this feeling. According to the American Anorexia/Bulimia Association, an estimated six- percent of American women has eating disorders. Low self-esteem and an unrealistic body image can trigger these eating disorders. A society that allows for such blatant expressions of contempt for women can only expect that women will be victimized. The media must begin to take some responsibility for the images, and the on-going implications of the image, that it presents. When turning the pages of a glossy fashion magazine, women are being invited by the ads and the carefully art-directed spreads to suspend their disbelief. It is hard to remember that the average American woman's dress size is sixteen, not six. And the average age is not eighteen. The average working woman doesn't have the resources or the time to devote a narcissistic pursuit of beauty.

Models look beautiful for a living. They have hair stylists, makeup artists, wardrobe people, manicurists, and skin care specialists to make them look wonderful. Not to mention the best photographers in the world who employ lighting, film stock and every other trick of the trade to enhance their beauty. The end result is so stunning that people forget to ask themselves why we should care who the women are, or care about what the ads are selling. Women's advertising should be directed toward the professional working women who are the target audience. Beauty and fashion ads are not just selling a product; they are selling a lifestyle. This idea of selling a lifestyle is similar to the fiction that Miss America "represents" America. This emphasis on a particularized type of beauty is becoming far too important to far too many people. Mode magazine has taken a step in the right direction. With a motto of "style beyond size," it features women with real curves who more closely resemble the average American woman in dress size. These women exude a healthy, positive appeal and wear fashionable clothing that is flattering. No smudged black eyeliner, expensively made up hair or glamour in these layouts. The beauty industry and magazines are not the sole cause of the problem though, there is plenty of blame to go around. And so we look at Hollywood. The cardinal rule in movies and television: sex sells. When people tune into watch a sitcom like "Friends," no one will see a single leading lady with a waist over size six. The only "imperfect" characters in the show are the "fat ugly guy and fat ugly lady" who live across the street and are objects of constant ridicule. The same can be said for virtually all mainstream shows on television. It is a continual barrage of beautiful people that are exposed to viewers. Unfortunately, it is becoming accepted that

society should indeed look like television actors. There is essentially no one in this medium saying that it is okay to be oneself, to look how women want to look and feel good at the same time. What society must do is tell the beauty industry, tell the magazines, and tell Hollywood that what they are doing is not acceptable. The image they portray is unrealistic, unhealthy, and irresponsible. However, it is unlikely that the beauty industry will loosen its grip on the minds of women and try so hard to make them think they are ugly. That would of course hurt sales and cause them to make only millions instead of billions of dollars. It is also improbable that Hollywood will break perhaps its only rule, because that too would disrupt the bottom line. So, for the time being anyway, we are a society being told how to look, and trying to live up to an impossible standard. Word Count: 1078