

Body image, eating disorders and advertising assignment

[Art & Culture](#)



Body Image, Eating Disorders and Advertising Body Image, Eating Disorders and Advertising We have all heard, “ you are what you eat”; however, and maybe more importantly, you want to be what you watch or read. How does today’s advertising impact on your body image? The shaping of our concept of the ideal body image begins at a young age and continues through adulthood. It begins with our toys; that first Barbie you received on your sixth birthday; the one with the long blond flowing hair and the perfect curves that could wear any outfit.

Thinking back to that day, I reflect on the times I stared in the mirror, wishing I looked like my Barbie and knew if I lost weight I would attract my perfect Ken. As I matured and put away my Barbie the fashion models of the day became my new idol and goal. The latest fashion magazine defined what clothes I should wear. As I grew into an adult, I became comfortable with the body my parents gave me and realized that too often magazines entice prospective readers with strikingly beautiful models and tag lines that lead us to believe inside the magazine lay the secrets to beauty, happiness and fitness.

For instance the woman staring back at me on the latest Runner’s World cover is not necessarily a stereotypical female runner. In fact, she portrays an image the average American will always fall short of. The fit blue eyed blond woman appears to be in her twenties. With carefully crafted make-up, professional lighting, and a talented photographer her face conveys exquisite beauty and strength. Her tied back hair; open stance and pleasant smile give her the girl next door look. Her well developed shoulders, fit abs

and toned muscular legs attest to her fitness. For an instant I long to look like her.

I think to myself if I can lose 5 pounds in four weeks like the magazine tag line reads it would be a great accomplishment; but even so, I could never look like the woman on the cover. Bombarded by media depictions of thinness as the ideal, many young girls and women develop a problem of body image and eating disorders. The media's focus on " ultra-thin" leads individuals to develop unrealistic beliefs that being thin will provide them abundance and happiness in life. There is a concerted effort on the part of marketers to use visuals to support the argument that thinner will make a person more attractive to the opposite sex.

In the case with Runners World they strategically placed an attractive, fit male and female on the cover in running attire. The words and images work together to make the point that thinness and fitness is the same. Yet the leading female runners look nothing like the woman on the front page. I admit, at least for me, the advertisement is effective. The allure of the tag line of " WEIGHT-LOSS SPECIAL" bolded in white catches the eye of the reader as they scan the magazine rack while the bolded title " LOSE 5 POUNDS in 4 Weeks" grabs the reader with an achievable goal.

The photos of the fit and attractive runners that accompany the tag line make us all believe we can be just like them. Clearly this is not the case. The average female body will never see the inside of a fashion magazine or the script of a television sitcom. New York agencies and Hollywood's ideal model or actress is a beautiful woman that looks gaunt. Today's models and

<https://assignbuster.com/body-image-eating-disorders-and-advertising-assignment/>

celebrities can be called “ rich and famous, with their shockingly thin frames, jutting hip bones, hollows in the buttocks, clearly visible ribs, gaunt, high cheekbones, and generous surgically enhanced breasts” (Ko, 2001).

For models and celebrities the main goal is to obtain status as a sex symbol. And if it means starving oneself or having plastic surgery done to enhance their bodies in order to obtain it they do it. A good example of this is; Actress Courtney Thorne-Smith who played opposite Calista Flockhart in the TV sitcom Ally McBeal. In order to appear as thin as her costar Courtney restricted her diet, worked out 2 hours a day and ran eight miles daily. What she didn't realize was her costar was naturally a thin person where her build was more athletic.

I have to admit that I wondered who is the fit blue eyed blond woman in her twenties gracing Runners World. I am familiar with most elite athletes in the running community; but I don't recognize the lithe runner gracing the front cover. I wondered who, is this girl staring back at me. Is she a runner or a professional model? Unlike most athletes that are featured inside the cover, there are no comments about her personal running successes. No stories about the major events she has competed in. No discussion about her training program or her favorite race distances.

Images, like excellent writing, possess the power to influence our emotions. They can create desire, incite disgust or inspire us to action. The model on the front cover is blessed with good looks and a naturally athletic physique. She brings both beauty and fitness to the cover of the magazine. Most female competitive athletes don't have her good looks. It is not who they

<https://assignbuster.com/body-image-eating-disorders-and-advertising-assignment/>

are. So in spite of their significant accomplishments on the track or the road they will not make the cover of the magazine. Even talented athletes must deal with body image issues.

The marketing view that the ideal fit body must be tight and excessively lean finds its genesis in the fashion model industry where many models are unhealthily lean. It is not abnormal to see male and female athletes with eating disorders as they strive to achieve the ideal look that media has established as the norm. Athletes look at losing weight for aesthetic reasons vice fitness reasons. They believe that being thinner will make them a better athlete. I have fallen prey to the ideal image portrayed in the magazines and with a coach's view of what a female runner should look like.

For me, it became quite apparent my senior year in high school. As a member of the track team and a hurdler I was never concerned with how I looked or the look of those around me. Our image was simply based on how fast we ran. Later, I was thrown into the world of distance running. Into a world of tall skinny women; who talked about dieting and who was thinner than whom. I was given books and magazines to read on training and diet. I attended talks from the distance running coaches on how I would run faster if I was lighter and thinner.

What the coach didn't realize was that he was contributing to variety of health and emotional problems in a young woman. I became dissatisfied with my body. In order to look the part I overused laxatives, calculated each calorie eaten, exercised twice a day, and eventually was diagnosed as being borderline anorexic and having a body image disorder. Female athletes often

<https://assignbuster.com/body-image-eating-disorders-and-advertising-assignment/>

restrict their food intake in an attempt to achieve an ideal body weight or shape to improve their athletic performance. One way to identify athletes at risk is the “ Drive for Thinness Score. ” Drive for thinness (DT) is a subscale of the Eating Disorder Inventory (EDI).

It actually is a “ self-report which measures the disordered attitudes about eating, body image, weight, and shape” (Drive for Thinness Score: One More Way to Identify Athletes at Risk, 2007). It consists of perceptual, behavioral, and attitudinal parts and is probably triggered when there is a discrepancy between actual and ideal body weight that exceeds the specific idealized preference of cultural thinness and involves body image dissatisfaction. It is often referred to as the triad (Drive for Thinness Score: One More Way to Identify Athletes at Risk, 2007).

Athletes that fall into this category can have behavioral changes when it comes to how they feel about food; which often results in restriction of food intake, or excessive exercise. Adults and young adolescents, today more than ever, are being treated for Eating Disorders. Images of ultra thin female bodies are everywhere. Women and their bodies sell anything from cars to food. Popular film and television actresses are becoming younger, taller and thinner. Some of these young and adult women have been known to faint from the lack of food.

Women and teenage magazines are full of articles and photo's urging that if you can lose those last ten to twenty pounds you can have it all, the perfect marriage, boyfriend, lots of friends, and a rewarding career. It has always been assumed that media images contribute to eating disorders. Just

<https://assignbuster.com/body-image-eating-disorders-and-advertising-assignment/>

recently the British Medical Association (BMA) reported in July that media images do contribute to individual self perceptions of body image. BMA believes that while there are those factors we can't change due to heredity and genetics there are those that can be changed. We can change socioculture expectations and the image of what it is to be an average woman" (McGlynn, 2000). Merryl Bear speaking for The National Eating Disorder Information Center (NEDIC) agrees that there is a lack of models that resemble regular or average women. She states that magazines do not cause eating disorders but reading them can cause a quest for perfectionism. When that perfection is not reached self-esteem becomes an issue. The lack of self-esteem and pressure to conform contributes to the development of eating disorders.

Public awareness of eating disorders got a boost in 1995 when Diana, Princess of Wales, " began talking about her struggles with bulimia openly" (Milne, 1998). Bulimia isn't the only disorder that affects adults and children. Anorexia nervosa, binge-eating disorder and exercise bulimia are also leading contributors. Anorexia nervosa, in most cases referred to as anorexia, is only one type of eating disorder. It is a psychological disorder. A person with anorexia may be concerned with obesity and getting heavy at first. This normally prompts the individual to start dieting to lose weight.

After awhile the individual sees the weight loss as a goal and it becomes a sign of control. " Anorexics restrict themselves from calorie intake; overuse diet pills, diuretics, laxatives and even enemas in order to reduce weight" (Edwards-Dryden, 20011). Teenage girls are the most at risk. It usually

shows up in early adolescence and in some cases young children and adults. Unlike anorexia, bulimia is a psychological eating disorder. Instead of restricting food, bulimics will binge eat and then vomit to rid their bodies of what they ingested.

The individuals with this disorder usually are hard to diagnose since the bingeing and purging are done in private. Lack of self-esteem appears to play a big role in this disorder, and like anorexia the fear of becoming fat is a significant motivator for the behavior. The most at risk for this disorder are professions such as “ modeling, dancing, gymnastics, wrestling and long-distance running (Bulimia). Everyday someone overeats because of perceived hungry or the dish is too good to not finish or famished after exercising. But what if you did this to extreme?

If overeating is a regular occurrence or an uncontrollable habit you may be overeating not because of those reasons listed but because you suffer from binge eating disorder. Individuals normally affected by binge eating struggle with “ feelings of guilt, disgust, and depression” (Binge Eating Disorder). They want to stop but feel they can't. The most at risk are individuals that have no outlet for stress. They use food for comfort and to cope with stress and other emotions. Exercise is a great way to take care of a stressful day.

But even exercise overdone to extreme becomes a disorder. Exercise bulimia is in the same arena as eating bulimia. Instead of eating the individual is obsessed with exercising to burn off the fat and calories they have ingested. Individuals with this disorder will schedule their whole lives around exercise, just like those with eating disorders schedule their lives around eating or not

<https://assignbuster.com/body-image-eating-disorders-and-advertising-assignment/>

eating. Exercise bulimia can damage the body due to the body never receiving adequate rest. It is often difficult to diagnose since everyone thinks exercise is healthy. Compulsive exercising has to do with control, the same way people with disorders use food as a way to control their lives” (Waehner, 2006). What motivates the models, athletes, and average individuals to succumb to eating disorders or body image issues? Our textbook, *Understanding Psychology*, describes it as “ the factors that direct and energize the behavior of humans and other organisms” (Feldman, 2009, p. 315). I believe the above group all respond to incentive approaches. Their desire to obtain thinness as a goal, either to gain acceptance in a society that looks at thinner as better, or if you re thin you can have it all it accounts for their motivation. This also includes cognitive approaches to motivation. Cognitive approaches believe “ that motivation is a product of people’s thoughts, expectations, and goals” (Feldman, 2009, p. 319). This theory drives home the difference between intrinsic motivations in which we do things because we enjoy them and extrinsic motivation which is the complete opposite; where things are done not because we want to do them but because we have a goal that we are reaching for that requires us to do them.

In most eating disorder cases it would be the later. In most instances of eating or fitness disorders extrinsic motivation drives behavior because individuals are motivated by the outcome, even if it is not desirable or healthy. Motivation and eating disorders in which the goal is thinness is not much different than obesity. A good example of this is anorexics and individuals who exercise to excess because they see themselves as

<https://assignbuster.com/body-image-eating-disorders-and-advertising-assignment/>

overweight even though they may look like a skeleton. They can refuse to eat, deny that they are hungry and also make excuses.

Feldman states " 10 percent of anorexics will eventually starve themselves to death" (Feldman, 2009, p. 327). It is believed these disorders stem from biological and social causes. Successful treatment includes therapy and also dietary changes. The need for achievement is also a motivating driver for behavior. Individuals often feel a need to be thin, the need to be a sex object, or the need to control one's eating. These individuals are often labeled as low achievement individuals and they manifest a desire to not fail.

They will do what is needed in order to be successful in their view of what success is. Treatment for body image and eating disorders is primarily physiological. Cognitive behavior therapy is used as a treatment for body image dissatisfaction. It has proven to be an effective way to deal with individuals who have eating disorders, obesity, and body dysmorphic disorder. It is a therapy done in a group setting that provides modest contact with the therapist. The main goal is that the program is for the patient to be self directed.

Other treatments include Individual Therapy, Eating Disorder Therapy, Telephone Therapy, Support Groups, Parent and Caregiver Consultations, Couples and Family Therapy, Psychological Testing for Eating Disorders.

Dietary Change is another type of therapy that is used to help the treatment of eating disorders. This is normally accomplished by visiting a nutritionist or a multidisciplinary health-care team. " Eating disorders are complicated they have mental health issues and medical and nutritional issues" ((ADA), 2011).

<https://assignbuster.com/body-image-eating-disorders-and-advertising-assignment/>

The American Dietetic Association “ believes that nutritional counseling is an “ essential component” of successful care for people diagnosed with eating disorders” ((ADA), 2011). The complexity and diversity of the therapy indicates that body image disorders are a significant issue. Society is bombarded by media depictions of thinness as the ideal form. Many young girls and women develop a problem of body image and eating disorders. Much of the conflict with personal appearance verses the perceived ideal image is created by unrealistic expectations generated by media.

The bottom line is; the media’s focus on the ultrathin leads individuals to develop unrealistic beliefs that being thin will do good things for them. Runner’s World will continue to put good looking bodies on the front cover with catchy tag lines like “ LOSE 5 POUNDS In 4 Weeks” to remain competitive on the magazine stand. On the other hand, those who come to realize that it is just advertising, like me, will disregard the cover and look to what’s inside the magazine for inspiration. It is not the genetically blessed model on the front cover that attracts me; but, the gifted athlete and her training program highlight inside the magazine.

As long as the magazine still arrives at my front door and inside I can learn how to train more effectively, I don’t care what or who is on the cover. I have learned, I will never look like her anyway; but, on the track, I will kick her cute gluteus maximus. References (ADA), A. D. (2011, August 01).

Registered Dietitians Are Essential for Successful Treatment of Eating Disorders, Says American Dietetic Association . Retrieved August 01, 2011, from Newswise: <http://www.newswise.com> Binge Eating Disorder. (n. d.).

<https://assignbuster.com/body-image-eating-disorders-and-advertising-assignment/>

Retrieved July 20, 2011, from Helpguide. org: <http://www.helpguide.org>
Bulimia. (n. d.). Retrieved July 20, 2011, from Mama's Health: <http://www.mamashealth.com>
Drive for Thinness Score: One More Way to Identify Athletes at Risk. (2007, May/June). Eating Disorders Review, Volume 18, Number 3 , pp. 1-3. Edwards-Dryden, R. (2001, August 1). Anorexia Nervosa. Retrieved August 01, 2011, from WebMDnewsletter: <http://www.webmd.com>
Feldman, R. (2009). Understanding Psychology. New York: McGraw Hill. Ko, M. (2001, October 8).

Blessed are the emaciated: even today's "fleshy" celebrities are seriously underweight, and they're setting a terrible example. Report Newsmagazine. (National ed.) Edmonton: Vol. 28, Iss. 19 , pp. 38-39. McGlynn, C. (2000). Unrealistic portrayals of wispy women: how media images contribute to eating disorders. The Journal of Addiction and Mental Health. Toronto: Nov/Dec Vol. 3, Iss. 6 , 13. Milne, C. (1998). Pressures to conform. Maclean's Vol. 111, Iss. 2 , 60-61. Waehner, P. (2006, March 24). Exercise & Eating Disorders. Retrieved July 20, 2011, from About. com: <http://www.about.com>