

Body image



Body image Concerns about young children's lack of understanding of advertising have frequently been voiced by parents, regulatory bodies, and politicians who, in turn, have been reassured by advertisers and marketers that children fully understand such advertising and there is no need for further research or regulation.

Much attention has been devoted to the susceptibility of teenage girls to the incidental influences of role models in advertising. In particular, there has been concern about the influence of advertisements containing physically attractive actors and models with very slender body shapes. Teenage girls tend to view their bodies critically and may hold negative self-perceptions about their physical appearance. Teenage girls are much more likely than teenage boys to question their attractiveness. This negative self-concept is especially likely to be manifest as dissatisfaction with body shape. Girls in their early teens, or even among those who are younger if they achieve puberty early, frequently express dissatisfaction with their body size and appearance (Williams & Currie, 2000).

The emergence of body image concerns is important because it may be associated with the appearance of disordered eating patterns. This is especially worrying when it occurs in early teen years that are in crucial period for physical growth. The more dissatisfied young girls are with their bodies, the more likely they are to undereat, with implications for their health and well-being.

Males, in contrast, usually take a different view of their bodies. That is not to say that boys and young men are unconcerned about their body image, but rather than wanting to be thinner and more attractive, many males want to be more muscular with greater bulk. For males, this represents greater

power. Whereas girls' self-concepts of attractiveness stem primarily from physical attractiveness, boys' self-concepts are linked to perceptions of physical effectiveness.

Analyses of advertising content in the media have shown a preoccupation with thin female body shapes. Women's magazines frequently contain feature articles that discuss dieting issues, thus reinforcing the subject and raising its place in female consciousness. Boys and men do not face the same types of attractiveness-related messages. Idealized images of men in advertising differ from those of women, and men's and women's reactions to these images are not the same.

Franzoi (1995) suggested that, given the differences in body orientation, there is a greater likelihood that females will be influenced by a mediated feminine ideal than men will be influenced by a mediated male ideal. In particular, females with low self-esteem and/or who have poor body images may be especially susceptible to depictions of physically attractive (and slender-shaped) models in. The tendency of female preadolescents and adolescents to compare themselves with models in advertisements is greater for those who hold less flattering self-perceptions of their physical attractiveness.

Magazine advertisements that include attractive models have the most influence on girls who had a poor body image themselves. On one hand, this means that such advertisements are effective vehicles for selling products, particularly to a group who may see some of those products as a way to improve their self-image. On the other hand, girls with poor body image may be especially vulnerable to images of physical beauty they view in advertisements. Such advertising may reinforce the pressures on young

people to conform to ideals of beauty that are hard or impossible to achieve. As Furnham (2000) pointed out, there has been an "epidemic" of dieting over the last few decades and includes primary school children. This, in turn, leads to the marketing of diet products, which although usually aimed at an older market, may also appeal to young children if they aspire to a particular body image. Though these aspirations may not be derived originally from images in advertisements, (because stereotypical images exist across all aspects of the media), advertisements can reinforce those stereotypes in some children and young people. The issue of stereotyping is discussed in more detail in chapters 2 and 7.

In conclusions, both girls and boys maybe susceptible to the influence of advertisements that depict body shape and physical appearance norms. While many girls seek to be thinner, many boys want to become more muscular.

Bibliography:

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