

History of advertising and its impact on women



Since the 1970's advertisers have always put thought into making their advertisements fantasies for consumers. Advertising depicts certain situations that cannot logically happen in real life. American advertisements evoke emotion and imagination for the viewers so they will buy their products. Our cultural values have changed since these commercials and ads have developed into more of a fantasy rather than a reality. Do you have a fantasy and if you do, have you realized it probably came from an advertisement? In this essay, I argue and reveal the truth about how advertisements, that likely cause physical and mental harm, have always been distorting images through photoshop or retouching tools to try and portray women as being vulnerable, unrealistic sexual fantasy objects.

Throughout the years in school did you ever notice the nerdy guy trying to fit in with the cool kids? Or were you the girl that wanted perfect white teeth, no blemishes, and to be super skinny like the models you see on advertisements? Our cultural values, are being consumed by sexual fantasies, validating genders, and wanting to look absolutely "perfect". Advertisements with fake fantasies can lead to people being offended, presenting women as the fantasy element, and effecting Americans body image to look and feel the same as the ideal "perfect" human.

In America, women feel pressured to live up to the "perfect" images depicted in advertisements. This can result into some negative effects on the body, like poor mental health and eating disorders. Photoshopping or digital retouching has negative impacts on body satisfaction with men and women. Advertisers retouch models' bodies to make them look skinnier, have no blemishes, and just about everything else on their bodies to make it a

fantasy for viewers. Models these days in America practically starve themselves to be as skinny as they can get and then photoshop comes in to retouch. Jean Kilbourne in her film, “Killing Us Softly – Advertising’s Image of Women” stated, “So the models literally cannot get any thinner. So photoshop is brought to the rescue” (18: 04). She spoke about how models have to be very skinny on runways and in advertisements, but even with models being skinny, photoshop still comes in to make them look even skinnier. The models in the photos look unhealthy and unrealistic for the perception of beauty.

In America, and possibly some other countries, women have begun to feel vulnerable from commercials. Women are feeling like they need to look a certain way in order to get guys they want or to fit into a desired social group. Advertisements make women look like vulnerable sexy fantasy objects for men. For example, a commercial with fantasy scenes tends to have women show their bottoms in tight jeans or a low-cut shirt to make it desirable for guys and for women to buy their products. Women also feel pressure to wear a certain size clothing to be considered skinny. Clothing sizes for women keep getting smaller and smaller for pants. Kilbourne explains the clothing sizes by stating, “on the deepest level, the obsession with thinness is about cutting girls down to size, and what could say this more vividly than this relatively new size in women’s clothing, size 0 and size 00” (17: 17). It’s not hard to come up with why women are more likely to have eating disorders, because society makes them feel like they’re fat if they’re not fitting in these small-scale sizes.

During the 1950s, advertisements were developed from the idea of couples enjoying their suburban lives outdoors with a cold beer or some other new product. This was a fantasy for some consumers during that time because people wanted to have what everyone else had and be happily married, but it became more sexual and men powering over women by the 1970s. This is when women were viewed as “ hotties” in commercials and nerdy men turned cool and got the girls after they tried the products presented.

Messner and Montez de Oca authors of, *The Male Consumer of Loser*, describe a Bud Lite commercial:

Two young, somewhat nerdy-looking white guys are at a yoga class, sitting in the back of a room full of sexy young women. The two men have attached prosthetic legs to their bodies so that they can fake the yoga moves. With their bottles of Bud Lite close by, these voyeurs watch in delight as the female yoga teacher instructs the class to “ relax and release that negative energy... inhale, arch, thrust your pelvis to the sky and exhale, release into the stretch.” As the instructor uses her hands to push down on a woman’s upright spread-eagled legs and says “ focus, focus, focus,” the camera cuts back and forth between close-ups of the women’s breasts and bottoms, while the two guys gleefully enjoy their beer and their sexual voyeurism. In the final scene, the two guys are standing outside the front door of the yoga class, beer bottles in hand, and someone throws their fake legs out the door at them. As they duck to avoid being hit by the legs, one of the comments, “ She’s not very relaxed”(1887).

Another good example of an advertisement or product that was a big fantasy for women would be the long-time famous fashion Barbie doll. Barbie was

<https://assignbuster.com/history-of-advertising-and-its-impact-on-women/>

created around 1959 and was a deeply desired product for little girls and even older women that wanted collectibles. There are almost one hundred fifty inspirational careers that the Barbie dolls were clothed in. For example, she was dressed as an astronaut, journalist, pilot, firefighter, and many more. The creators of the Barbie doll wanted to create the most diverse doll on the market, which they succeed to do. There was a post on Tumblr, a website for blogs that was about Barbie. The post made it seem as if Barbie was talking on the blog.

The blog post was titled, *Barbie: “ Why Posing for Sports Illustrated Suits Me”*, she started by describing that she was created by a mother and her daughter. She talked about how she was created by the ideas of girls having something to play with, to dream and have imagination. When Barbie stated about the dreams and imagination, the thought process immediately changes to fantasy for the product. The fantasy is for girls to have a doll that they can play and have dreams of being like how Barbie is. There always are some cons that come with fantasies and products made, for example, the Barbie doll looks almost “ too perfect”, has a very slim figure, and gets any career she wants. This creates the idea in girls’ minds that they need to be just like Barbie, wear makeup and be slim and tall. Barbie on the post makes a fantastic women empowerment statement to define that women can be whomever they desire and make your dreams your own. She stated, “ The reality of today is that girls can go anywhere and be anything. They should celebrate who they are and never have to apologize for it”. She tries to get girls to realize that they can do what they want, look however they want, and they should not care what other people think of them.

Advertisements, as shown in this essay, try to get Americans to buy their products with fantasies, and consumers do not even realize they are doing this. We develop desires to buy products because of the emotional and sexual connections from the commercials. Women in the advertisements and those watching develop a feeling of vulnerability and men feel the need to show masculinity to be included as the cool guy that can get any woman. Women these days are trying to get involved in women empowerment to show that society should not downgrade them. America's cultural values will continue to stay the same as long as advertisements show fantasies. Possibly over time Americans will get too fed-up with seeing unrealistic retouched images, and America will change for the better.

Works Cited

- Barbie. " Why Posing for *Sports Illustrated* Suits Me." *Barbie Collector*. Mattel Inc., 17 February 2014. Web. 17 June 2014.
- Kilbourne, Jean. *Killing Us Softly 4* . Media Education Foundation. Dir. Sut Jhally. 2010. Film.
- Messner, Michael A., and Jeffrey Montez de Oca. " The Male Consumer as Loser: Beer and Liquor Ads in
Mega Sports Media Events." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 30. 3 (2005): 1879-1909. Web. 8 February 2014.