

Women in Advertisements: Women or Objectified Thin Bodies?

Bocage Barthelemy Yvana^{1*}, Houtin and Laurene^{1,2}

¹Laboratoire Parisien de Psychologie Sociale Université de Paris-Nanterre, France

²Ad Hoc Lab, France

*Corresponding author: Yvana Bocage Barthélémy, Laboratoire Parisien de Psychologie Sociale Université de Paris Nanterre, France

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Abstract

Since the beginning of Humanity history, women are one of the main focuses of attention. Women have to deal with beauty standards which are dynamic and are changing over time. Thus the actual beauty standard is very thin: to be beautiful, women have to be very thin. But women bodies in ads are retouched and unrealistic. Hence, when women with real bodies are confronted to thin-ideal bodies, they are, in fact, confronted to an unattainable standard of women beauty. By now, many findings suggest that repeated exposure to such unrealistic standards have negative and significative implications on women. Some of these effects could certainly be avoided if individuals, and especially women, were better informed about the unrealistic and harmful nature of this norm and its consequences.

Keywords: Objectivation; Thin Ideal; Advertisements; Women

Introduction

Since the beginning of Humanity history, women are one of the main focuses of attention. They have a lot of duties; have to adopt specific behaviors and to be good mothers and good wives. Specifically, women's bodies are, since several decades, in the spotlight too. Women have to deal with beauty standards which are dynamic and are changing over time. With the apparition of mass media, the social pressure doesn't only come from pairs and parents but also from media [1]. By now, mass media is considered as the most powerful and persuasive source of influence [2-4] as they are constantly surrounded by advertisements even when we do not necessarily pay much attention to Most ads (whatever the promoted product) use women bodies which depict the ideal norm of feminine beauty. Women in ads are presented as perfect, thin, beautiful, with smooth skin, very white teeth and unrealistic measurements [5]. Since the 1980s to the 1990s, we observe a significant decrease in the weight of female models [6] as models are now mostly underweight. Thus the actual beauty standard is very thin: to be beautiful, women have to be very thin. But women bodies in ads are retouched and unrealistic. Hence, when women with real bodies are confronted to thin ideal bodies, they are, in fact, confronted to an unattainable standard of women beauty. By now, many findings suggest that repeated exposure to such unrealistic standards have negative and significative implications on women. By setting what is appreciable or desirable in a woman [7], standards provide women with indicators to assess their own

bodies. Social comparison with the weight standard contributes to the construction of women's image of their own bodies [8] and since the standard is excessively thin, many women overestimate their weight, and even perceive themselves as overweight when they are objectively not [9]. Moreover, a perception of excess weight lead women to suffer from "normative discontent" [8] and a body dissatisfaction [10,11] which can affect women's quality of life by generating low self-esteem [12], anxiety and even depression [13] and a greater accessibility of suicidal thoughts [14]. It also generates negative behavioral consequences: women who are dissatisfied with their bodies tend to use fast, harmful and unhealthy weight loss eating and physical practices [15], and weight overestimation predicts the use of behaviors that lead individuals to gain weight [16-19].

Conclusion

In addition, the thinness standard makes overweight synonymous with normative deviance. People who are overweight are the target of stereotypes: they are suspected of eating in secret, refusing to control their diet, losing control of themselves when eating, and over-consuming [20-22]. Overweight women are specifically considered as not being feminine and sensual [23]. Moreover, overweight individuals experience significant stigmatization [23-25] which obviously affects their quality of life and food behaviors. It also may also lead women who perceive themselves as overweight to make poor food choices and to consume more fatty and sweet

foods through stereotype threat [25,26]. Some of these effects could certainly be avoided if individuals, and especially women, were better informed about the unrealistic and harmful nature of this norm and its consequences. Unfortunately, only a few are. We believe that public policies should address this limit and provide women the key elements to limit the negative consequences of exposure to the slimming standard, particularly in advertising.

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