

8-12-2019

## How Fashion and Beauty Advertising Negatively Effects Women

Olivia Free

Bowling Green State University - Main Campus, ofree@bgsu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/writ>



Part of the [Public Relations and Advertising Commons](#), [Visual Studies Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Free, Olivia (2019) "How Fashion and Beauty Advertising Negatively Effects Women," *WRIT: Journal of First-Year Writing*. Vol. 2: Iss. 2, Article 6.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25035/writ.02.02.06>

Available at: <https://scholarworks.bgsu.edu/writ/vol2/iss2/6>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at ScholarWorks@BGSU. It has been accepted for inclusion in WRIT: Journal of First-Year Writing by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks@BGSU.

## How Fashion and Beauty Advertising Negatively Effects Women

By Olivia Free

[ofree@bgsu.edu](mailto:ofree@bgsu.edu)

Advertising influence has largely increased over the last ten years as a result of a growing materialistic society. In this society, consumers are exposed to thousands of different advertisements per day. As a result, advertising has played a big role in the development of a society that seeks materialistic goods and acceptance before core values. Advertisings have become so predominant in the United States that consumers have turned a blind eye. It is important to realize the extent in which advertisings are being thrown into everyday lives. From car ads, to food ads, to clothing ads, and the most problematic industry, fashion and beauty ads. It is also important to realize the subject of most fashion and beauty ads: women. Women's bodies are being objectified and dehumanized, causing a drastic decline in self-esteem and an increase in overall body shaming from the unrealistic expectations presented in advertising. Women are falsely portrayed in these types of advertisements, causing developing girls and women to feel guilt and shame when comparing themselves. The negative effects of fashion and beauty advertisements among women include unrealistic expectations, objectification, and sexualization.

Characteristics of conventional beauty are as followed: "no lines or wrinkles, no scars or blemishes, thin, tall, long-legged, and young" (Kilbourne, 2016, p. 184). This type of beauty is highlighted more often than diversified beauty. Victoria's Secret, for example, uses the [same body shape to market their products](#). The classic hour-glass, stick-thin body type is used showcasing each model as perfect. When women see this in advertising and notice the consistency in each body shape, it becomes important to them to reach that unrealistic image which is Photoshopped most of the time. Instead of embracing who they are, "women go to great lengths to manipulate and change their faces and bodies" (Kilbourne, 2016, p. 184) to conform to this norm. In Jean Kilbourne's (2016) article, "Beauty and the Best of Advertising," she highlights the way women are conditioned to view themselves. "A woman is conditioned to view her face as a mask and her body as an object...constantly in need of alteration, improvement, and disguise" (2016, p. 184). Roberts and Gettman (2004) also touch on this concept of body manipulation saying, "Women spend millions of dollars each year on cosmetics, surgery, and weight loss reduction programs to try to achieve the ideal body" (p. 19). Unrealistic expectations are present in weight-loss advertising too. Power World released their weight loss collection in 2015 and used a model who fit the "norm" of conventional beauty as the spokesperson for the collection. The model, again, has the [classic hour class figure and is extremely thin](#), which is ironic due to the fact that she is

promoting a weight-loss collection. This type of advertising goes back to the idea mentioned earlier in the essay, false reward. Because this model is ridiculously thin, consumers expect to look similar, if not exact, to the way that she looks as a result of using the product. This, in turn, refers back to having unrealistic expectations. If a woman sees this advertising and her body does not fit society's norm, she will purchase this collection in hopes of looking like the model. Working toward this body type can be very challenging and unrealistic for someone who is overweight. Nadya Kahn says, "The truth is, no matter how many times we are told that all body types are beautiful, we will never truly accept that notion, as long as we're surrounded by ads promoting unrealistic body images" ("Should Body-Shaming Ads Be Banned?" 2016, p. 4). Women are "made to feel dissatisfied with and ashamed of herself, whether she tries to achieve 'the look' or not" (Kilbourne, 2016, p. 184). Advertising is important in a consumer world, but is it necessary to showcase one specific body type? Where is the diversity? Women should be able to feel comfortable in their own skin without feeling the need to modify themselves to look like someone else.

Businesses need advertising, but advertisers do not need to display women as objects in order to sell the product. Objectification occurs in more areas than one in the world of advertising. Many beer companies use the women's body as the beer bottle to grab consumer's attention. In Jean Kilbourne's (2015) article "Jesus is a Brand of Jeans," she acknowledges that "We know by now that advertising often turns people into objects. Women's bodies—and men's bodies too these days—are dismembered, packaged, and used to sell everything" (p. 33). Within the fashion and beauty industry, women are objectified in different perfume ads and clothing ads. This type of objectification is considered to be sexual objectification which means "becoming instrumental in the eyes of an observer implies that one is not seen as a complete human being anymore" (Vaes, Paladino, and Puvia, 2011, p. 774). [This advertisement](#) is for Tomford perfume. It is blatantly obvious that the women's breasts are being used as objects to showcase this specific perfume. The way this image is presented, it seems her skin is clammy from just having sexual intercourse caused by wearing this specific brand. The question of who this advertisement is specifically intended for comes into mind because it is so ambiguous it is hard for consumers to determine whether the product is for men or women. What is this advertisement portraying? "Wear this perfume or cologne and you will have sex"? This concept opens the door to false reward. False reward is the idea of purchasing a product in hopes of receiving some kind of reward, such as the perfect body, sexual intercourse, weight loss, or gratification from the product brand. This idea can be depicted in multiple different advertisings, but for the purpose of this essay, the focus will be fashion and beauty.

Objectification and dehumanization are closely linked in advertising. The concept of dehumanization is very similar to objectification. Dehumanization is the process of depriving a person or group of positive human qualities. It has more of an emotional toll on a person rather than the physical aspect of objectifying them. These two ideas go hand and hand. American Apparel is notoriously known for their branding and usage of pornographic images to sell their clothes. The models, of course, are women. The women are photographed half-naked. Why? Because being able to sexually objectify them and dehumanize them of their qualities is all a part of the advertising game. In the article “Are sexualized women complete human beings?” researchers Vaes, Paladino, and Puvia (2011) agreed that “Sexually objectified depictions often show women in sexually provocative and humiliating positions and present quite often an unattainable beauty image” (p. 775). The same argument is made in a different article presented through the opinions of Tomi-Ann Roberts and Jennifer Gettman (2004): “Women’s bodies are used to sell merchandise, and are more often depicted in ways that emphasize their sexuality” (p. 17). [The next image](#) is one of American Apparel’s advertisements, the headline “Now Open” in big bold letters referencing the model’s legs. Dehumanization is very evident because of the way she is positioned and the degrading aspect of the ad title.

Sexualization is often linked to sexual objectification and dehumanization. Sexualization is evident in multiple different advertisements and it positions the models to look as if they are having sex. Most of the time the product being sold is not the main focus; instead, the attention is on the half-naked models. For example, look at [this advertisement for Calvin Klein Jeans](#). As consumers, our focus is instantly drawn to the three sweaty models that are half-naked laying on a couch with only a little glimpse of the actual product: the jeans. Again, the idea of having sex in the product goes along with false reward. “Wear this product and you will have sex.” Images for advertising are everywhere and often focus on this idea of sexualization. Since women’s bodies are exposed, women view their bodies as flawed because their body does not match that of the models, and their “self-image is deeply affected. Girls’ self-esteem plummets as they reach adolescence partly because they cannot possibly escape the message that their bodies are objects, and imperfect objects at that” (Kilbourne, 2015, p. 34). Fashion and beauty advertisements cause women to form an unrealistic expectation they have for themselves and the way their body should look. Advertising should not have to be sexualized in order to catch consumer attention. There should be an alternative way to grab the attention of consumers instead of putting a half-naked woman on billboards.

In a continuously growing consumer driven world, advertising has become prominent in everyday lives. With the increase in advertising comes a negative

effect on the consumer population, especially women. Women are the main models for these types of advertising, particularly in fashion and beauty. Because of this, multiple negatives come from extensive exposure to degrading advertising. These include unrealistic expectations, objectification, and sexualization. It is obvious that advertising is needed in a materialistic society, but does it need to continuously degrade women? The answer is no. There should be alternative ways to grab the attention of consumers rather than sexual exposure of women. It is important to realize the extent in which these types of advertisings are around consumers and the negative effects they have on women specifically.

### References

- Kilbourne, J. (2015). Jesus is a brand of jeans. *Humanist*, 75(6), 32-35.
- Kilbourne, J. (2016). Beauty and the beast of advertising. In B. K. Scott, S. E. Cayleff, A. Donadey, & I. Lara (Eds.), *Women in culture: An intersectional anthology for gender and women's studies* (pp. 183-186). Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Roberts, T., & Gettman, J. (2004). Mere exposure: Gender differences in the negative effects of priming a state of self-objectification. *Sex Roles*, 51(1-2), 17-27. doi: 10.1023/B:SERS.0000032306.20462.22.
- “Should Body-Shaming Ads Be Banned?” (2016). *Scholastic Choices*, 32(3), 2-5.
- Vaes, J., Paladino, P., & Puvia, E. (2011). Are sexualized women complete human beings? Why men and women dehumanize sexually objectified women. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 41(6), 774-785. doi:10.1002/ejsp.824.