Warning: Exposure to media beauty standards can be hazardous to your physical and mental health!
Sex, Stereotypes and Beauty: The ABCs and Ds of Commercial Images of Women

a presentation by

NOW Foundation
National Organization for Women
Love Your Body Campaign
[A] Advertising

www.loveyourbody.nowfoundation.org
Advertisers promote a beauty standard that doesn't come naturally (or cheap) to most women.
The beauty industry promises that...
Long, shiny hair
Smooth, glowing skin
How would you rather whiten your teeth?

New Aquafresh White Trays have been designed by cosmetic dentists for whitening that fits you. They’re easy to apply, flexible, disposable, pre-filled trays for a custom fit. For teeth that are visibly whiter in as little as 3 days, with full results in just 7. More information and money-saving offers at AquafreshWhiteTrays.com

Whitening that fits you

Pearly white teeth
Plump, full lips
are all within your reach.
There's not a body part that *can't* be improved...
...or so say advertisers with products to sell.
Finally, JUST FEET. Footcare has never been so irresistible.

Beautify your feet
Change your eye color
Enlarge your breasts

“All women want curves. Now I have them.”
Even "rejuvenate" your vagina!
Is it possible to buy the "perfect" face? the "perfect" body?

Earl Jean
Even models aren't perfect. Make-up, lighting and airbrushing create the fantasies we admire, as shown in a revealing video from Dove.

View the full video at www.campaignforrealbeauty.com
Because the mainstream beauty standard is so pervasive yet so unnatural, advertisers know their products will never be obsolete.
And women will always feel inadequate.
"Thin is in" has been the official fashion mantra for decades now.
We are bombarded with images of incredibly tall models.
With flat stomachs, visible hip bones
And long, slender legs
For some advertisers, women can never be too skinny
How can the average woman live up to this ideal without risky dieting, extreme exercise or liposuction?
Advertisers often present women as sexual exhibitionists, performing for the benefit of the male gaze.
Through images like these, women come to think of themselves as always on display.
Women's bodies and sexuality are used to sell countless products to men.
A night out at the club is marketed using visual "come-ons" from sexy models.
Advertisers rely on naked women to add allure to all kinds of products.
Q: Did you catch the phallic symbols in the last two ads?

A: They were a cigar and a sword.
The beauty and fashion industries love to push "edgy" themes, like drug abuse.
Women are objectified when they're turned into the product itself, just another "thing" to be bought and consumed.
Warning: The next two images are from mainstream publications, but border on pornographic
Women are dehumanized when offered up as isolated body parts, oiled up and ready for male consumption.

Note the implied phallic symbol on the left and the woman's blow-up doll mouth on the right.
Women who appear to be in danger or distress are a common subject in fashion ads.
Violence is glamorized when victimized women are presented as gorgeous and sexy.
This ad, which suggests a gang rape about to occur, was removed from the market by D&G after public outcry.
[B] Boys to Men

www.loveyourbody.nowfoundation.org
How do boys and men learn to see women?
As a series of body parts?
As a reward, a symbol of success and luxury?
It's not unusual to see ads featuring women in positions that are submissive to men...
...women portrayed as accessories, as passive possessions of men...
...or women as men's saucy servers.
Women and men are frequently portrayed in sexually suggestive situations, where the woman appears ready and willing to please.
The male fantasy of multiple women is played out in many ads.
Male objectification of women is accepted, even expected. A woman's value is measured by her ability to attract male attention.
Male bonding through the practice of belittling women is often put to use in ads aimed at men.
The stylish and accomplished man is entitled to a sexy, bikini-clad woman waiting at home for him.
Even the nerdy guy can get some action if he knows what to do — supply alcohol (or mojito gum, in this case).
What images do men see of themselves?
Look through men's fashion magazines and you'll find symbols not just of physical beauty but also of strength, dignity, individuality, and other admirable traits not often linked to women.
Men and boys are typically presented as proud, in control, and—fully clothed!
Images of men depict them as bold, adventurous, in motion.
Men are styled and framed to imply power and status.
Athletic prowess and age convey authority.
There's room for polished and scruffy in a man's world.
[C] Celebrity Obsession

www.loveyourbody.nowfoundation.org
The media's obsession with female celebrities' looks and personal lives sends a message to all women...
...a woman's life is public property, especially her sexuality and reproductive status.
Who's too skinny? Who's too fat?
Who's had plastic surgery? Who looks pregnant?
Celebrity magazines are littered with ads for diet products, often hawked by stars themselves.
Stars like Tyra Banks, known for their looks and swimsuit bodies, are pressured by the media to stay slim. They can't let the paparazzi catch them looking like they eat!
Breast obsession: Us Magazine devoted a four-page spread to celebrity cleavage.
Female pop stars are now routinely marketed as sexual commodities, starting at ages barely past puberty. Monitoring their subsequent scandals and downfalls is part of the process.
What do the average woman and Paris Hilton have in common? Women are supposed to be sexy, but if they flaunt their sexuality or have too much fun, they're labeled sluts.
Anna Nicole Smith spent her life trying to fulfill our society's elusive beauty standards and sexual ideals, dying young like her idol, Marilyn Monroe.
Are male and female actors portrayed differently?
One magazine. Two actors. Spot the difference.
Robert Downey Jr. is portrayed as active, even threatening, while Christina Ricci is passive, vulnerable.
[D] Dangers

www.loveyourbody.nowfoundation.org
Media messages and images can contribute to:

- Low self-esteem
- Body image issues
- Eating disorders
- Compulsive exercise
- Cosmetic surgery risks
- Accusations of being a slut or a tease
- Blame for being targeted with sexual assault
- Dehumanization of women and girls
Many women rarely see themselves reflected in our popular culture. We need to see more:

- Women of color and different ethnicities
- Women of different sizes, shapes and ages
- Women with disabilities
- Active, strong women and girls
- Smart, successful, in control women
- Anyone who does not fit the “ideal” description of what a girl/woman should be
- Men in non-traditional roles
Some advertisers are incorporating diverse, positive, refreshing images into their campaigns:
Advertising's concept of beauty is expanding
Successful women are portrayed more often
The sexes are being presented in nontraditional roles:

Women as adventurous

Men as nurturing
But it's still NOT enough!
Ending the tyranny of beauty standards and sex stereotypes would change women's lives...
Freedom from beauty standards can mean:

> Confidence, pride, celebration of all kinds of shapes, sizes, skin tones, ages...
> Less stress; jumping off the beauty treadmill can be relaxing
> Less money spent on beauty products, diet gimmicks, spray tans, surgery...
> More time to focus on school, work, hobbies, athletics, politics, community, personal fulfillment, spirituality...
> More time to build for the future, develop skills that will last
What we all need to do:

> Talk back to advertisers that objectify girls/women
> Talk back to media executives
> Talk back to retail outlets
> Stand up for ourselves and other women

> Share this message with other women/girls AND men/boys
> Participate in NOW Foundation's Love Your Body campaign
Sex, Stereotypes and Beauty: The ABCs and Ds of Commercial Images of Women

A presentation of the NOW Foundation's Love Your Body campaign

Copyright 2007