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PREVIEW

THE INFLUENCE OF THE BEAUTY OF ADVERTISING MODELS
ON FEMALE PREADOLESCENT AND ADOLESCENT
SELF-PERCEPTIONS, SELF-ESTEEM, AND BRAND INTENTIONS:
A LONGITUDINAL STUDY

by

Mary C. Martin

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Interdepartmental Area of Business
(Marketing)

Under the Supervision of Professor James W. Gentry

Lincoln, Nebraska

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DISSERTATION TITLE

The Influence of the Beauty of Advertising Models on Female Preadolescent
and Adolescent Self-Perceptions, Self-Esteem, and Brand Intentions:
A Longitudinal Study

BY

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GRADUATE COLLEGE
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA

THE INFLUENCE OF THE BEAUTY OF ADVERTISING MODELS ON FEMALE
PREADOLESCENT AND ADOLESCENT SELF-PERCEPTIONS, SELF-
ESTEEM, AND BRAND INTENTIONS: A LONGITUDINAL STUDY

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University of Nebraska, 1995

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Using social comparison theory as a basis, this dissertation proposes that female preadolescents and adolescents compare their physical attractiveness to that of advertising models. While studies have begun to investigate the effects of beauty images in advertising, this dissertation considers the role of one's *motive* for comparison: self-evaluation, self-improvement, or self-enhancement. It is proposed that the temporary effects of beauty images in advertising may not merely accumulate over time, but that they may differ from the long-term effects. A two-stage data collection was conducted to assess both the temporary and long-term effects.

In phase one of the data collection, an experiment was conducted with females in grades four, six, and eight from public schools in the Midwest. A between-subjects design was used to assess the temporary effects. Dependent variables included self-perceptions of physical attractiveness and body image, desired body image, future desired body image, self-esteem, comparison standards for physical attractiveness, and intentions to consume adornment products. The results of the analyses suggest that motive does play a role in the comparison process as differential effects on self-perceptions were found across motives and across grades. For example, self-perceptions of physical attractiveness were raised temporarily after self-improvement.

In phase two of the data collection, the long-term effects of the advertising images of beauty were assessed using partial correlations. Frequencies of occurrence of each motive (measured at Time 1) were correlated with the dependent variables (measured at

Time 2) while controlling for measures of the dependent variables taken at Time 1.

These results suggest that motives are differentially related to long-term changes in the dependent variables. For example, self-perceptions of physical attractiveness are negatively related to the frequency of comparison for self-evaluation or self-improvement while they are positively related to the frequency of comparison for self-enhancement.

PREVIEW

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PREVIEW

CHAPTER I

PURPOSE AND PLAN OF STUDY

"Woman's Best Years End with Puberty" (Lincoln Journal-Star 1993)

"Why It's So Tough to be a Girl" (Perry 1992)

PURPOSE OF STUDY

Recent headlines illustrate a growing concern in our society--the plight of female preadolescents and adolescents as they grow up facing many obstacles, including receiving less attention in the classroom, unrealistic expectations of what they can and cannot do, decreasing self-esteem, and being judged by their physical appearance. In particular, females are generally preoccupied with attempting to become beautiful. "Today's specifications call for blonde and thin--no easy task, since most girls get bigger during adolescence. Many become anorexics or bulimics; a few rich ones get liposuction. We make their focus pleasing other people and physical beauty" (Perry 1992).

Further, studies show that self-esteem drops for female preadolescents and adolescents to a much greater extent than it does for males, with self-perceptions of physical attractiveness contributing to the drop (e.g., Harter 1992). Attempts to counter this trend have been made. For example, a "Happy to be Me" doll is being marketed with proportions of 36"-27"-38," versus the usual 36"-18"-33." However, the Barbie doll still remains a popular cultural phenomenon, with someone somewhere in the world buying a Barbie every two seconds, making 2.5 Barbies for every household in America. Further, Barbie dolls and accessories bring in three quarters of a billion dollars a year for Mattel (Cunningham 1993). Cunningham (1993, p.81) describes her experience with Barbie dolls:

When I was ten years old, I didn't know that I was longing for a Rubenesque or a Titianesque, rather than a Barbiesque, visual model. I didn't know at the time that she was influencing and reinforcing possible cultural norms of physical beauty, norms that I would never be able to even approximate. I didn't know that most men want Barbie doll women, the ones with long blonde hair, innocent baby-blue (or baby-lavender) eyes, substantial Cosmocover melons, tiny waists, flat tummies, taut bottoms, and long graceful legs. (And absurdly small feet: Barbie doesn't even have to wear heels in order to be "hobbled"--it's built into those ridiculous concubine feet.) I didn't know that to be considered desirable, I would have to be a centerfold, zipped into my nakedness like a shrimp in its casing. If I had known all of this, I would probably have thrown myself off Hoover Dam and never reached age eleven.

This "sense of inadequacy" instilled upon women's self-concepts, it is proposed, is one of the unintended consequences of advertising (Pollay 1986). As Pollay (1986, p. 27) writes, "We are all potential victims of the invidious comparisons of reality to the world seen in advertising. Once convinced that the grass is greener elsewhere, one's own life pales in comparison and seems a life half-lived."

Cunningham (1993, p. 81) reports what critics are saying, that advertising is "one of the predominant art forms of our time" with "its messages the only ones being heard," and Americans accepting "the marketplace as the arbiter of values." For example, studies suggest that advertising and the mass media may play a part in creating and reinforcing a preoccupation with physical attractiveness (Downs and Harrison 1985; Myers and Biocca 1992; Richins 1991; Silverstein et al. 1986) and influence consumer perceptions of what constitutes an acceptable level of physical attractiveness (Martin and Kennedy 1993; Peterson 1987; Richins 1991). Further, studies have found that female college students and female preadolescents and adolescents do compare their physical attractiveness with that of models in ads (Martin and Kennedy 1993, 1994a, b; Richins 1991) and that female preadolescents and adolescents have desires to be models (Martin and Kennedy 1994a).

As an aspiring young model, Lee (1993, p. 118), for example, describes "the model trap":

I'd like to think I am politically correct, socially conscious, and enlightened about the objectification of women by the media. And I am. But deep down inside, I still want to be a supermodel. Just for a little while. A plastic doll, a human hanger... Unfortunately, I don't think this love/hate affair with models will end soon... But for now, as long as they're there, screaming at me from the television, glaring at me from