

The Effect of Media Images of Beauty in Women Magazines Among Female Students

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The effect of Media Images of Beauty in Women Magazines among Female Students*

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A. Introduction

The definition of beauty has evolved throughout time. Women who considered being beautiful in the Victorian could not represent beauty in this decade. Some people assume that beautiful is applicable for everything. Some assume that beauty only can be applied to certain classes and categories. According to common saying, the definition of beauty is in the eye of the beholder. From this assumption, it can be understand that physical attractiveness is a very subjective thing to define. Furthermore, if the definition of beauty is based on the eye of beholder's subjectivity, which is mixed with his or her ideology or discourse, so this definition is socially constructed. This has been influenced by the culture and environment of eye of beholder; his ideology, religion, social class and media. Therefore, people from different cultures or religious group may have severely contracting definition of physical attractiveness. Clearly, influences such as, ideology, media and class system shape individuals' concept of beauty (Berger, 1995). Ideology and culture can be constructed within society by the power of the ruling class (Berger, 1991). Therefore it might possible that people from non-dominant culture and dominant culture have the same concept of beauty.

Women's magazines as a representative of media culture promote ideals way of life among women. Media culture is assumed to have powerful forces to influence individuals' behaviour; how to see them selves, how to see others in which leads them to

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create identity (Kellner,1991). Furthermore, media culture, itself, is supported by the dominant ideology that creates products and program through media that support to the value of to be white, patriarchal and capitalist culture. The media must win those who are in the position as subordinated such as women, the working class and the minority. This subordinate class should consume their products to create identity in order to become the member of the dominant culture. This idea was emphasized by Marxism theory.

To ascertain this notion, a problem will be arose here is to examine whether individuals who have become minority within a society and have different ethnic background from the dominant culture were influenced by beauty images depicted by the media. Therefore, in this research, I will examine the definition of female attractiveness hold among International female student in the University of Newcastle. The study will examine whether they have a different opinion of what they though as good-looking women from the representation of good-looking women in Australian women's magazines.

In the recent time, most individual seemed to agree that the definition of beauty was based on economic interest. Wolf (1991) suggests that the definition of beauty in modern life is fairly inventive. The beauty is not about women at all but it is about dominant ideology, that is, economics institution. Wolf ascertains that the definition of beauty reinforces by beauty industry such as fashion, cosmetics, sport center and plastics surgery. Thus, the image of beauty are popularize through media such as women's magazines. Women magazines promote the consumer lifestyle by showing how beauty can be bought in market places. To be an ideal women can be resolved by purchasing a certain product.

Another institution of dominant ideology supports the definition of beauty is the institution of men. According to Wolf (1991) the beauty is forced to be embodied by women and men must have to possess women who represent it. Beautiful women are exposed their sexuality in Media in which become a mirror of the audience. Fashion industries, for example, represent the beauty by clothing number ten for ideal women.

A study by Urla and Swedlund (2000) indicated that the economy plays importance role to standardize the beauty and ideal women. They analyzed that Barbie has shaped the idea of women about ideal women. This doll has transformed images of how to be beauty among women. The slenderness of its body, which is far from norm, becomes standard of women to come to surgery table and eating disorder. In total, Barbie has created images of how to become good-looking women by consuming some products in the market places.

Another study by Tebbel (2000) revealed that the depiction of attractive women in the media provide only thin women. She suggest that the media tend to address women that successful women depend on the ability to wear a size 10 dress and have energy and the bank balance to maintain the body and face of teenager. This situation, in turn, leads women to consume advices in media that a personal problem can be solve by purchasing a certain products to look good.

Nevertheless, the depiction of physical attractiveness has many impacts on women. Laird et al (2000) who studied the impact of media of super-slender women on women self-esteem, unveiled that the information of stereotyping of physical attractiveness influences some women emotion. Viewing pictures of slender models had

affected women to feel unhappy and more concern about their weight and reduce self-esteem.

However, although much work has been done, more studied need to be conducted to ascertain the effect of standardization or stereotyping in the media concerning individuals from non- dominant culture.

Study 1

The first study employed content analysis on advertisements of three Australian women's magazines that is largely read by women in Australia.

Sample advertisements were drawn from three magazines; Cleo, Marie Claire and Cosmopolitan. The criterion for inclusion in the study was that the magazines have a large and predominantly female readership to ensure that advertisements would be targeted to female audiences.

In these magazines yielded advertisements for a broad array of products and diverse advertisement providing sole-female images. In total, the sample consisted of a set of ads containing images of women that large groups of female readers will likely see. A copy of the selected magazines published on November 2001 was obtained and used in the sampling procedures. Every ad in which a sole-female image appeared was included in the sample. Excluded were female images with other persons, including children. However, images with animals, such as dogs and cats were included in the sample. Advertisements that appeared in the other two magazines and that use the same person included only one in the sample for a given magazine. All advertisements selected for the sample were numbered and coded.

Coding sheet

The coding sheet used contained a variety of measures that provided a detailed and comprehensive examination of physical qualities of the women appearing in the selected magazines. The reason for this coding scheme was that the image of woman in advertisement could be appraised by enumerating her features in which she is posed.

Study 2

This study employed a qualitative approach, where adolescent were asked their ideal women. This was done by presenting them with sets of photograph of media personalities favoured by most of adolescents and letting them talking freely about who could and could not be considered good-looking, and why. Subsequently, they were asked to summarize their view by choosing the most "apt" qualities of ideal women from a range of descriptors. This open-ended methodology was adopted in order to elicit share view about beautiful women in which can be regarded as social representation of the ideal images.

Sample

Four international female students who read Australian women's magazines volunteered in participating in the interview and questionnaire. They are from different ethnic backgrounds who already have stayed in Australia more than six months. Their ages are ranging from 20s up to 30. Two of them have changed their hair colour. All of them are unmarried and read Australian women magazines.

Material and procedures

An extensive range of pictures of media personalities- film stars, models and miss universe from magazines and TV (e.g. Naomi Campbell, Elle McPherson, Lara Dutta, Denise Quinones August)- was presented to 20s up 30 years old international female students in individual interviews. In order to access their culture ideals, they were asked to discuss whom they thought look good and to describe in their own words the individual depicted in photos.

The stimulus materials selected on the basis of the pilot study were 10 photos of models and representative of miss universe. All adolescences were shown this photos in individual interview and asked to choose photos of women they thought "looked good" and to discuss why. Discussion was used to help the interviewee reflect on the qualities they saw in these photos of beautiful women. Finally, they were asked to summarize their ideals beautiful women.

B. Analysis and Result

Study 1

The incident of sole male images in selected magazines differed across titles. The total sample contained 112 advertisements. Marie Claire was the larger contributor with 36 ads, Cosmopolitan was the lowest, 30 advertisements. The results for the media images in the sampled advertisements are organized according to physical features and attractiveness of woman himself.

The Physical features of sole-female images

The incident of female feature was ascertained by coding of the female models shown in advertisements. The coding is including all part of the body shown in magazines such as, hair, face, and body.

Hair-related dimensions

The physical characteristics associated with hairstyle were also analyzed to address research question one. The majority of women have long hair of their shoulder. In term of hair colour, most of them have light brown hair. Only two of women have curly hair.

Face appearance

Face characteristic such as, colour of the eyes, shape of the mouth and shape of face were appraised to answer the first question as well. The vast majority of women have pointy nose, blue eyes, oval face and large eyes.

Body Types and skin

One global measure of the physical qualities of women is the body shape. Body shape was classified according to whether they fat or slim, short or tall. Women in all advertisement were overwhelming judge to have bodies that were slim and tall. Regarding skin, the vast majority of models have smooth, fine and normal.

These first results were provided to answer the first question that the vast majority of women depicted in Australian women's magazines were slim, brown large eyes, pointy

noise, light brown hair, shoulder long straight hair, tall, and fine smooth skin. These characteristics represents of western beautiful women.

Study 2

Preliminary analysis of interview showed that participants chose some photos infrequently. The analysis presented here focuses on the 2 descriptors that had been picked up by sample that are the picture of Elle McPherson and Denise Aquas August, Miss universe 2001. Results are interpreted that female international students who chose western women who they though "attractive" have already adopt some western characteristic of beauty such as, hair color. When they asked about their hair colour, they answered that to be more beautiful. Other students chose Miss Universe responded that they chose Miss Universe because she is Miss Universe, she must be the most beautiful in the world. According to them, some other pictures might be more beautiful but they do not really famous and they do not know them.

Most participants focus on the people that they have already known. When they were asked that what made the women that they though "look good" beauty, all of them responded that body is the first reason to be beauty and the second is faces. None of them chose models that have the same as their characteristic.

C. Discussion and conclusions

In summary, taking both studies together, the main finding to be highlighted is that beauty-image ideals are multidimensional. The concept of beauty hold by participants is

linked directly their own beauty. For instance, participants who chose light brown hair Anglo women (e.g. Elle McPherson) have tinted their hair with the same colour and participants who chose models with the reason of healthy looking and athletic body, practices exercise regularly and maintain health carefully. However, the reason of their practices such as hair colour and sport can be reflected as well from the depiction of beauty in Australian women's magazines which shows that most of the women depicted with light brown hair and very slender.

The research strategy adopted in study 2 can be viewed as a limitation of current research, in the sense that the way the participant were asked about their ideal women seems to confuse several kind of ideals (How I would like to be, why I like this photos). Future study may be taken to well addressed this problem. However, the main purpose of Study 2 is to find the concept of beauty among participants from ethnic different ethnic backgrounds. Social psychology research on stereotypes demonstrates that these kinds of shared images are organized hierarchally and that there is a broad stereotype (Deaux et al, 1984).

A further contribution of research reported here is that this finding concerning concept of beauty that all participants responded that thinness and body weight is the first reason why chose their ideal women. This may be due to the fact that thinness and weight are integral to ideas about ideal women that illustrate in ads in women magazines. Future research needs to examine this finding due to limitation of participants and time that leads to the finding of this research is still questioned

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