WHAT ADOLESCENT GIRLS LEARN ABOUT GENDER ROLES FROM ADVERTISING IMAGES

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Second International Conference
Popular Culture and Education
7 - 10 December 2011
Hong Kong Institute of Education, Hong Kong
funding

- Supported by Faculty Research Grant
ADVERTISING HAS BEEN INTERWOVEN IN OUR EVERYDAY LIFE AND HAS BECOME ONE OF THE MOST UBIQUITOUS MANIFESTATIONS OF MODERN POPULAR CULTURE (FOWLES, 1996)
Research objectives

To examine

- What advertising images adolescent girls pay attention to
- How they interpret those advertising images
Theoretical framework

Social learning theory (Bandura, 1986)

- Sex (biological) v.s. Gender (psychological + social)

- A child learns sex-appropriate behaviors and establishes gender identification expectations in his or her own culture

- Gender role socialization from socializing agents, including family, schools, textbooks, friends, and most importantly, from the media
Methodology

- A visual method: more relevant and feasible because of high HH ownership of digital cameras

- Interviewees were asked to take 7-10 digital photographs each day for a week about what girls or women should or should not be, and what girls or women should or should not do

- Followed by a face-to-face individual interview
Interviewees

- 20 Hong Kong girls
- Age between 15-18
- 10 studying at local schools, 10 at international schools; 4 Caucasians, 16 Chinese

Data analysis

- Comparison analysis method (Marshall and Rossman, 1999)
- Comparing and contrasting data constantly (Strauss, 1987)
Findings

Altogether 276 pictures collected by interviewees were advertisements.

18 out of 20 interviewees captured at least one ad image.

No. of images from advertisements collected by individual interviewees varied from 1 to 62.
Race of the model

- Asian: 25.4%
- Caucasian: 67.8%
- Cartoon character: 3.6%
- Asian, Black and/or Caucasian: 1.8%
- No model: 1.4%
Based on the digital images that interviewees had taken, they were asked what girls or women should be or should not be, and what girls or women should do or should not do.

During the interview, girls refer to 132 ad images and talk about *gender*. 
Seven dominant themes about gender roles from advertising images:

1. Appearance
2. Personality
3. Skills and work
4. Activities and interest
5. Family
6. Health and safety
7. Care people and environment
Theme 1: Appearance

The largest no. of responses

Interviewees mentioned 94 times about how girls or women should have for physical appearance
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Appearance (94)</strong></th>
<th><strong>Frequency</strong></th>
<th><strong>Frequency</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>not too skinny</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>wear light perfume</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>natural looking</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>have acne free and white skin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not have cosmetic surgery</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>avoid the sun to make white skin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not have flawless skin</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>have beautiful finger nails</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not wear heavy makeup</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>have own style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not wear makeup</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>not highlight hair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not dress older than her age</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>look like characters in &quot;Sex and the City&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>take care of skin</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>not look weird</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not wear high end clothing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>mysterious beauty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wear light makeup</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(continuous)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

21
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appearance (94)</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>wear accessories</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>normal body shape</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wear beautiful clothes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>normal body size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wear clothes you like</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>not perfect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wear cool clothes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>not skinny and flawless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wear demin</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>not skinny and have big breast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wear makeup</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>slim after giving baby</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wear nice clothes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>not stand unnatural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wear normal clothes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>not take a slimming course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wear pretty clothes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>not trace the trend of being slim</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Theme 1: Appearance

Not too skinny

Interviewees comments:

ridiculous, weird, unnatural, or unrealistic
“I think she looked fine before the treatment. She now looks nearly anorexic.”

Theme 1:
Appearance

Not too skinny
Theme 1: Appearance

Not too skinny

“She is way too skinny. There is a bit that just makes me feel bad about myself. You think WOW she is super skinny”.
“I’ve never seen anyone with legs that thin. If I every saw someone with legs that thin, I would think she needs to eat a meal and get some help because that’s not normal.”
Theme 1: Appearance

Not too skinny

“She is so thin. Look at the ankles. It’s just ridiculous. It’s so obvious it’s been photoshopped. I hate they are publicizing for making you beautiful”.
Theme 1: Appearance

*Not too skinny*

TV ad for prevention and treatment of eating disorder

“In the mirror she looks at herself as fat, but in reality she is actually quite thin. To me, that’s pretty scary that girls think themselves into this type of thing.”
Theme 1: Appearance

Be slim after giving baby

Print ad for cord blood bank

“She just gave birth to a baby. I think women should be slim after giving birth to a baby. (Why?) Beautiful. Just after the baby is delivered, she is fit again.”
Theme 1: Appearance

Look natural

Should wear light makeup and wear normal outfit

Should not wear heavy makeup, have cosmetic surgery, and wear slutty clothing
Theme 1: Appearance

Look natural

“She looks completely normal. She’s not wearing that much makeup. Her clothes look normal.”
Theme 1: Appearance

Look natural

“She looks cute. You don’t have to be blond and wear slutty clothing. Their faces look strange. They don’t look like they are real.”
Theme 1: Appearance

Look natural

“I don’t know I would never be influenced by this kind of thing. I try not to be.”
"Some women like to change their face and body shape by medical. It is bad. Because when you change your body shape, it is not natural anymore."
“This is just so ridiculous. How can you not be thinking she’s had an eye widening surgery. She is clearly wearing makeup or it is just a different woman. I just hate it.”
Theme 1: Appearance

Not have cosmetic surgery

“She gets a thinner face and skinny. I don’t think it is a good way to get thin. If you want to be healthy and beauty, you should do exercise rather than having this.”
Theme 1: Appearance

Not wear makeup or heavy makeup

“I think it’s too much (mascara).”
Theme 1: Appearance

Not wear makeup or heavy makeup

“A lot of my friends wear makeup and personally I don’t wear makeup. They don’t want to leave their home without their makeup. I don’t think you need that you shouldn’t be. They don’t need the makeup.”