

picture perfect



the media

The media is flooded with reports about the damaging effects that unrealistic advertising messages have on our body image. But, if you turn the page or change the channel, there are only more images and messages keeping the problem going!

Perfect waistlines, flawless skin and curvy breasts fill television screens, magazine covers and billboards all over the world. But sadly, as soon as these advertisements go up, your self-esteem goes down as you compare yourself to the 'pretty people' in the ads. I could easily fill this article with disturbing statistics and pictures of underweight models. But I haven't. Instead, I want to help you understand advertising so that you can make educated decisions for yourself.

picture not so perfect

Trust me, when a model walks in to be photographed for an advertisement, they look nothing like the 'finished product' you see in the ad. But I think most of us already know that. So let's clear up a few more advertising and media myths.

myth

all airbrushing is bad

Airbrushing, digital enhancement and retouching (they're basically the same thing) are commonly misused and misunderstood terms. The truth is, in advertisements nearly everything is airbrushed. From the apples in the grocery catalogue to the houses in the real estate brochure, chances are that the image has been digitally altered in some way. But this isn't the problem. It might be 'unrealistic' but an airbrushed car, for example, doesn't leave you feeling unattractive and worthless. This is the problem - when the airbrushed images distort our perceptions of what our body should look like. A model can lose 10 kilograms or gain bigger breasts with a few mouse clicks.

myth

it's all the fault of advertising

Advertisers, marketers and magazines are often the first to cop the biggest chunk of blame for poor body image. Sure they play a big part, but let's not forget the role that parents, peers, technology and educators play too. But wait! It would be easy to just blame someone else. At some point, we must all take responsibility for our own actions too ... which leads me to the next myth.

myth

there's nothing I can do

Start thinking for yourself instead of being manipulated by the pictures in the ads. Empower yourself, make decisions for yourself and realise that YOU ultimately control what is presented in the media. That's right. You say what's on the billboards, magazine pages, computer and television screens. You control advertising content and you don't need a Journalism degree to do it. You're in charge - from the swipe of a credit card to the click of a computer mouse or the press of a television remote. Advertisements don't create themselves. They follow demand. Advertisements use flawless models because you (or maybe not you, but a lot of people like you) buy the product. So if you don't like what you see in magazines, billboards, television and the internet, don't support the brand, the product or the company with your hard-earned dollar. As a single consumer, you are more powerful than you can possibly imagine. **(b)**



If you want to learn more about all this kind of stuff, have a flick through the book *Does my bum look big in this ad?* It's a little handbook to help you navigate your way through the media maze.

Like this article, the book doesn't lay blame solely on one particular industry or profession. It is simply an educational tool so that you can understand what you see, hear or read.

It's written with the combined efforts of advertisers, educators, psychologists and media professionals and is due to be published next year. But I'd also love to hear your thoughts on these issues so feel free to email me at lisacox@mail.org or check out LisaCoxPresents.com