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**Policy Paper Regarding Body Image in the Media**

In today’s society, it is unthinkable to go a single day without being constantly bombarded by images in the media. Between fashion editorials to commercials for products such as shampoo and mascara, it is nearly impossible to find an ad that has yet to be digitally enhanced. When photoshop is used for ads that focus on selling cosmetics or dieting supplements, the consumer is deceived to believe that they will achieve the same outcome as the image. This will eventually lead to body dissatisfaction in consumers, especially young women. Ad campaigns feature impossibly skinny models that have had their proportions altered even further. Young women look at these ads and try to achieve the unnaturally altered bodies. This pressure to look perfect has lead to eating disorders in many women and even men. In fact one in ten college age women has an eating disorder (“Body Image & Nutrition: Fast Facts”). In order to make our own citizens healthy and accept their own bodies, existing policies need to be reinforced and additional policies need to be created. Section 5 of the Federal Trade Commission Act should be amended to include altering body proportions of models and then strongly reinforced. In addition to the existing law, we will need to implement a law resembling one recently passed in Israel, which bans models from the industry under a mandated Body Mass Index (BMI) and requires agencies to release if an ad has been photoshopped (Dankner). These actions will ensure that realistic body images are being shown to young women and men, which will result in a more positive body image in young adults and hopefully a decrease in body dissatisfaction.

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) was created in 1914 by President Woodrow Wilson (“Federal Trade Commission: A History”). The goal of this department is to protect the American consumer from being taken advantage of and to enforce the FTC Act. Section Five of this Act “prohibits unfair or deceptive acts or practices in or affecting commerce” (“Federal Trade Commission Act Section 5: Unfair or Deceptive Acts or Practices”). However, wouldn’t enhancing images used to advertise a weight loss product or a cosmetic be in violation of this Act? This is done all the time. In fact, the Huffington Post found that in mascara ads, 58% have airbrushed the lashes to make them appear longer and fuller and the additional 42% admitted to adding false eyelashes add volume and length (“Majority Of Beauty Ads Digitally Enhanced”). When ads that have been digitally enhanced are circulated in society, they allow their consumers to believe that they will be able to achieve what is promised. The truth is, consumers won’t be able to since the images accompanying the product have been altered. This should be classified as “unfair or deceptive act or practices in or affecting commerce” (“Federal Trade Commission Act Section 5: Unfair or Deceptive Acts or Practices”) since the eyelashes are enhanced and consumers will purchase the product thinking that they will be able to achieve what was advertised.

Recently, we have seen mascara ads criticized for enhancing eyelashes. This past winter, a CoverGirl ad featuring Taylor Swift advertising their new mascara was pulled out of circulation due to the fact that her eyelashes were airbrushed to appear longer (Little). The ad did feature a warning stating that Swifts lashes were enhanced in post production. The problem was that the warning was in such tiny print, it was barely legible. After the advertisements were pulled, the National Advertising Division (NAD) released a statement agreeing with Proctor & Gamble’s actions. The also stated “it is well-established that product demonstrations in advertisements must be truthful and accurate and cannot be enhanced” (Little).

While the FTC has been cracking down on photoshopping, they need to redefine what it means to deceive consumers. In our society, “the law has contributed to the creation of an environment in which women are conditioned to hate their bodies and strive for an unrealistic and unattainable ideal form” (Glazer 115). Many ads not only photoshop blemishes or enhance certain features, but they also completely change the proportions of the models body. Women are then exposed to these unrealistic images and are conditioned to believe that these unnatural figures are not only attainable, but also something that they should strive for.

These ads that feature models with unrealistic proportions are deceiving women everyday, however the FTC is not regulating them. While it is honorable that the FTC will pull a mascara add because it is deceiving consumers, it is also disheartening that there is no action taken against the ads with altered proportions and body features. These ads are certainly more harmful to the population because women, and men, will go to drastic measures to achieve these features. Eating Disorders such as anorexia and bulimia have already leaded to numerous deaths in both genders. It has also been proven that both men and women can exhibit body dissatisfaction, which leads to anxiety, depression and eating disorders (Gregor). This policy needs to be amended to include the alterations of body proportions, which deceives consumers more than enhanced eyelashes.

One country has taken action to help with the body dissatisfaction among its citizens. This past March, Israel passed a new act that has been come to be known as the “Photoshop Law” (Danker). This law requires that models in the fashion industry have a Body Mass Index (BMI) above 18.5 before they are allowed to work. The law also requires that if photoshop is used, that there needs to be a disclaimer on the actual ad, so consumers are aware the image has been altered (Danker). The government in Israel saw that there were many people who were unhappy with the way they looked and were desperately trying to alter their bodies. They are hoping that this new legislature will help improve the way people view their bodies and overall lead to more satisfaction.

The United States should follow in Israel’s footsteps, with a few changes. There should be a certain health standard that models must uphold, however it should not necessarily be determined by their BMI. There are plenty of women who are at their healthy weight yet still maintain a BMI lower that 18.5. The models featured in advertising campaigns should have to under go a physical and be cleared by a doctor in order to work. This will ensure a healthy body image being projected in the media.

There should also be an additional medical element in the proposed policy. Models who are interested in entering the fashion industry should also have to undergo therapy. Even models cannot escape the pressure to stay slim. They are probably more at risk for eating disorders than a regular consumer. Models should have to meet with a therapist before they begin work and then every six months after for mental check-ups. This will allow therapists to intervene if any models show signs of eating disorders. This policy will not only ensure the physical and mental health of the consumers, but also of models working in the industry.

Where there is a mental component of this policy for the models, there will also be a campaign launched to target the population most at risk for eating disorders: young women, especially those at middle or high school age ("Eating Disorders: Risk Factors"). This would be a program that is designed to teach these children about eating disorders; what they are, how to spot them in peers and where to get help. By educating the population that is most at risk, hopefully the rate of eating disorders will begin to decrease. Also, this program will show the differences between a photoshopped body and a real, unaltered body. This will help girls who are likely to strive for the unrealistic figures portrayed in the media discover how to distinguish between the true and the false.

Of course, no legislation has ever been passed without opposition. With a topic as controversial as body image in the media, there is almost guaranteed to be some form of resistance. The biggest opponent to the passing of this policy would be the fashion industry. This cut-throat industry would act out against this saying that we can not simply change the standards of beauty our culture has by simply passing a law. It is something that takes years, decades even, to form. However, there was one point in time when most women strived to look like Marilyn Monroe, who was roughly a size 10/12 in American standards. Today she would be considered a plus size model, but back in the 1960’s she was normal size. If women could aspire to have the size 10 body of Marilyn Monroe fifty years ago, the standards can surely change back to that if this policy was enacted.

There can be backlash anticipated from models as well. Although the policy proposed here simply requires models to be healthy, mentally and physically, and not reach a certain BMI like Israel’s law, the models may think that this will intrude on their own privacy. However, there are plenty of jobs that require that one receives a physical and be healthy before starting work. Models who normally work ten-hour days on photo-shoots, barely eating, should know that they are physically and mentally healthy in such a demanding and difficult job.

In the past few year, there have been some efforts to try and change the way body image is perceived in the media. Dove launched the Real Beauty Campaign featuring women of varying shapes and sizes. All of the ads these women were featured in were not enhanced or altered in any way. While campaigns like his are positive signs, there needs to be more assertive action to ensure the elimination of body dissatisfaction. The FTC needs to amend Section 5 of the FTC act to include the altering of body proportions as misleading the consumer. There should also be medical regulations regarding the models working in the fashion industry to ensure their physical and mental health. It is obvious that there need to be changes made in regard to the portrayal of body image in the media. Although this policy would not fix the entire problem, it would be a huge step in the right direction. As Glenn Marla once said, “there is no wrong way to have a body”. The media needs to start to embrace this quote in order to change the beauty standard and allow women and men everywhere to love life in their own skin.

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