



LESSON PLAN

Level:	Grades 8-12
About the Author:	Adapted, with permission, from <i>Living in a Material World: Lessons on Commercialism, Consumption, and Environment</i> , © the Center for the Study of Commercialism, Washington, D.C; an 8-lesson curriculum to help young people gain perspective on commercialism and consumerism in today's society.

The Price of Happiness: On Advertising, Image, and Self-Esteem

Overview

In this lesson students answer a brief questionnaire related to self-image, self-esteem, and advertising, and then work as groups to create and act in mock television commercials that parody advertising techniques.

Learning Outcomes

Students will demonstrate:

- understanding of the ways in which advertising presents images of men and women which are limited in their scope;
- understanding of the ways in which advertising presents images of appearance, personality traits and societal roles of men and women that are sometimes neither appropriate or desirable.
- awareness of how their own feelings of happiness and esteem may be affected by advertising.

Preparation and Materials

- Create an overhead for *Definition of Advertising*

Photocopy student handouts:

- *Advertising and Image*
- *Student Questionnaire*
- *What Do Advertisements Tell Us?*

Procedure

Inform students that you are asking them to complete a brief, anonymous questionnaire. Distribute the *Student Questionnaires* and allow a few minutes for students to complete them.

Optional: Ask for a team of volunteers to tally the responses. Present the results to the class. Are the results what students would have expected?

Present the *Definition of Advertising*, as provided on your overhead. Briefly discuss:

- Are ads more likely to make people feel satisfied or dissatisfied with themselves?
- Why would it be to an advertiser's advantage to make people feel satisfied or dissatisfied with themselves?
- In what ways do ads benefit us?
- Are ads created primarily for the consumer's benefit or the advertiser's benefit?
- Introduce the concepts of self-image and self-esteem:
 - *Self-image* is a person's image or conception of himself or herself
 - *Self-esteem* is a person's conception of her or his own worth; belief in oneself; self-respect
- Distribute the background readings *Advertising and Image* and *What Do Advertisements Tell Us?*. Allow time for students to read them.
- Discuss key points.

Activities

- Divide the class into small groups of three to four students. Explain that students will be creating mock TV commercials. Allow each group to choose a particular type of product, such as soft drinks, tennis shoes, makeup, etc., avoiding duplication of product type.
- Clarify that the assignment is for each group to plan and act out a commercial for the class. The goal is to reflect or parody how real commercials often rely on manipulation of viewers' self-image or self-esteem in an attempt to influence them to purchase a product. (If you wish, discuss the concepts of caricature and parody.) Remind students that real commercials are typically no more than 60 seconds in length. You may want to help them get started by brainstorming a list of image-related ad themes, such as hair, skin, weight, and looking cool, sexy, athletic, tough, etc.
- Explain that groups need to develop a logically consistent framework for their product and ad. As they plan, students should write on paper and/or on the board:
 - their names
 - the product type they have chosen
 - names for their company and product
 - what segment of the public they are targeting or marketing their product to.

Note: Minimizing planning time will allow for more in-depth discussion later.

- Have students present their commercials.
- Review major points from *Advertising and Image* and *What Do Advertisements Tell Us?*. To provide closure, discuss:
 - Ads tend to present a limited view of the personality traits and societal roles that are appropriate or desirable for boys and girls, men and women.
 - Ads can foster an unnatural level of preoccupation with appearance.
 - Ads can present unreal, unattainable images of physical attractiveness.

- Ads can injure our self image and self esteem... if we let them.
- In what ways does advertising benefit us as consumers?
- Are you likely to look at ads any differently now? In what way?

Variations/Extensions

- Request that students draft a complete, written script for their commercial prior to performing it. Or, if equipment is available, videotape the commercials.
- To assist students in gathering their thoughts, incorporate short writing assignments after each main segment of the activity: the questionnaire, reading, commercials, and discussion.
- Analyze and discuss racial stereotypes in advertising: Do ads tend to present a limited view of the appearances, personality traits, or societal roles that are appropriate or common for people of various racial or ethnic backgrounds? (African Americans as athletes and musicians, etc.)
- Discuss ads directed at men or women in terms of the ads' effect on the opposite sex. What kinds of images or expectations of appearance, personality traits, and societal roles may be fostered by advertising?
- Discuss the ethical implications for advertisers of some of the concerns raised in this activity. (Should all advertisers be painted with the same brush because of the actions of a few individual advertisers? What are the rights and responsibilities of advertisers, as individual companies and as an industry?)
- Discuss the use of uniforms in schools in light of considerations raised in this activity.

Evaluation

Framework for commercials and group presentations.

Definition of Advertising

Definition of Advertising

advertise:

1. to tell about or praise (a product, service, etc.) publicly, as through newspapers, handbills, radio, etc., so as to make people want to buy it;
2. to make known; give notice of;
3. to call the public's attention to.

advertisement:

1. the act of advertising;
2. a public notice or announcement, usually paid for, as of things for sale, needs, etc.

(New World Dictionary, Second College Edition)

Advertising and Image

Do advertisements influence our self image and our self esteem?

Some critics accuse marketers of systematically creating anxiety, promoting envy, and fostering feelings of inadequacy and insecurity to sell us their products. Marketers respond that advertising does nothing more than mirror society's values, alert people to new products and bargains, or motivate people to switch brands. At the very worst, they say, it bores or annoys.

Of course, some ads provide information useful to consumers. And advertising clearly plays a valid role in an economy based on a system of free enterprise. The question is not whether advertising is valid; clearly, it is.

The concern discussed here is the relationship between the images presented in ads and our sense of self. Can ads influence what we perceive as valid roles for ourselves in our society? And can our self-image and self-esteem be influenced by advertising?

What are the images that ads present? Everywhere we turn, advertisements tell us what it means to be a desirable man or woman. Ads paint limited images of what men and women can be. Because ads are everywhere in our society, these limited images sink into our conscious and unconscious minds. In this way, ads help limit our understanding of our worth and our full potential.

Ads tend to present women in limited roles. Girls and women in ads show concern about their bodies, their clothes, their homes, and the need to attract a boy or man. Seldom are women shown in work settings, business roles, or positions of responsibility and authority. Our society recognizes many valid roles for women, but this isn't always reflected in ads. Also, the girls and women in ads are presented as "beautiful." But ads offer a very limited, narrow image of beauty. The advertising industry favours models with facial features that look Anglo, even if the model is Black or Hispanic.

Ads also present a very thin body type as though it were the most common or most desirable body type. Researchers have found that girls and women who work as models weigh 23% less than the average female their age. And the hips of an average department store mannequin measure six inches less than that of the average young woman.

Girls, women, boys, and men seeing these commercial images may be influenced to think of an ultra-thin female body as more normal or desirable than one of average weight. The extreme preoccupation with weight fostered by advertising images is reflected in the fact that 80% of 10-year-old girls report having dieted and that eight million American women suffer from anorexia or bulimia, two potentially life-threatening eating disorders.

In reality, many different kinds of facial features and body types are beautiful. Besides, the flawless appearance of women in ads isn't even real. It's an illusion created by makeup artists, photographers, and photo retouchers. Each image is carefully worked over. Blemishes, wrinkles, and stray hairs are airbrushed away. Teeth and eyeballs are bleached white. In some cases, the picture you see is actually made of several photos. The face of one model may be combined with the body of a second model and the legs of a third.

So many of the pictures we see are artificial, manufactured images. What happens when a girl or woman compares her *real* self with this narrow, unreal image of "perfection"? She may feel unattractive. When her self-image suffers, often her self-esteem is damaged too. She then looks for ways to improve her image and self-esteem.

Ads also present an image of the "ideal" male. Although ads targeting boys and men do not present as narrow an imaginary physical ideal as do ads targeting girls and women, they still present a very limited view of masculinity. For girls and women, body image is emphasized in most ads. For boys and men, the image emphasized is an image of attitude. Boys and young men in ads typically play the part of someone who is cool and confident, independent, even a rebel. Men in ads tend to have an aura of power, physical strength, confidence, dominance, and detachment. The implied message for the viewer is that this is the way to be cool, this is the way a young man should act.

The male image shown in ads almost never includes such traits as sensitivity, vulnerability, or compassion. This may discourage boys and men from displaying these natural and desirable human traits. Ads may thus limit a boy or man's sense of what he can or should be.

The actors in ads tend to be handsome, with clear complexions and hair that is perfectly combed or perfectly windblown. They are also almost always athletic. Physical or even sexual prowess is suggested in scenes of physically challenging, dangerous, or aggressive sports. The self-image of boys and men who do not exhibit these traits for example, who have normal complexions, are not athletic, and don't feel cool and confident may suffer when they watch these ads. Negative feelings about oneself, whether related to appearance or anything else, can be followed by lower self-esteem.

Ads offer to sell a new self-image.

Of course, the ads that injure our self-image and self-esteem don't stop there. They conveniently offer to sell a product that will solve our newly imagined "problem."

Consider this quote from Nancy Shalek, president of an advertising agency: "Advertising at its best is making people feel that without their product, you're a loser. Kids are very sensitive to that. If you tell them to buy something, they are resistant. But if you tell them they'll be a dork if they don't, you've got their attention. You open up emotional vulnerabilities and it's very easy to do with kids because they're the most emotionally vulnerable." Another person involved in marketing, Charles Kettering, said that selling new products is about "the organized creation of dissatisfaction."

Many commonly accepted ideas about appearance - for example, that skin should be blemish free and teeth bright white - are not absolute truths. These expectations were artificially created over a period of years by those who wanted to sell certain kinds of products and promoted the idea that we needed those products if our physical appearance was to be acceptable.

Let's take a closer look at this emphasis on appearance.

Ads tend to convey the idea that appearance is all-important. They teach us to be self-conscious about how we look. When we grow up surrounded by ads, intense self-scrutiny may seem normal.

Of course, all cultures have their own ideas about the traits that make a boy or man and a girl or woman attractive. Often these ideas are very, very different than our own. Rather, it is the level of concern with physical appearance that makes modern Americans unique. The intense concern with appearance that is so common in our culture has not been the norm in most cultures. It is an artificial concern that we have acquired from living immersed in a society dominated by commercialism.

The Price of Happiness: Student Questionnaire

Circle "yes" if something has been true once or many times and "no" if it has never been true. Your answers will remain anonymous.

- I have sometimes felt bad about myself for not having something. Yes No

- I have felt that others might like me more if I owned a certain item. Yes No

- An ad has made me feel that I would like myself more, or that others would like me more, if I owned the product that the ad was selling. Yes No

- I have felt that others might like me more if I looked different — if my face, body, skin, or hair were different. Yes No

- An ad has made me feel that I would like myself more, or that others would like me more, if I could change my appearance with the product that the ad was selling. Yes No

- I sometimes worry about my appearance, about whether I look attractive. Yes No

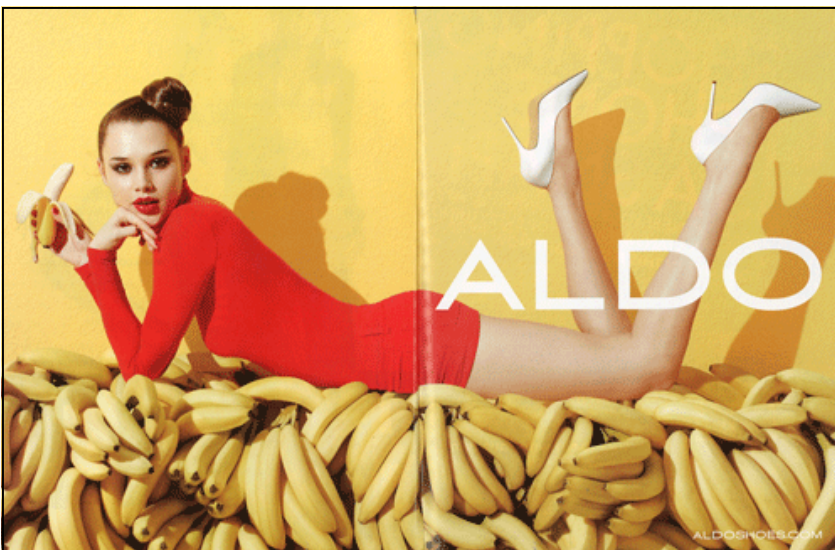
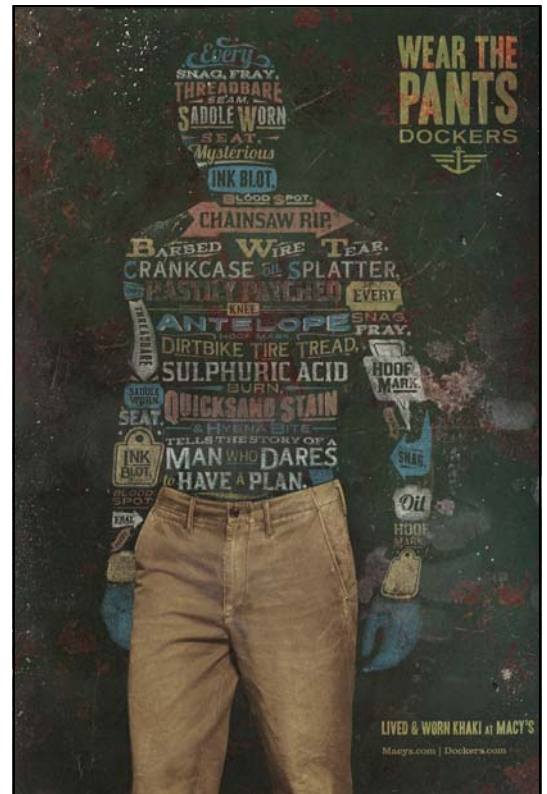
- I would like others to form their opinion of me based on:
 - _____ what I look like and what I own
 - _____ my personality and character traits

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What Do Advertisements Tell Us About Being a Man or Being a Woman?



Attitude is everything – advertisements directed toward men often suggest that the male ideal is embodied by such traits as muscles and toughness.



Advertising often projects a very narrow image of youth and beauty, as though this image were an ideal toward which all girls and women should aspire. What explicit and implicit messages are absorbed by young girls after years of exposure to such advertising?

