



## LESSON PLAN

**Level:** Grades 9 to 12  
**About the Author:** MediaSmarts

# Kellogg Special K Ads

## Overview

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This lesson helps students understand the relationship between body image and marketing by exploring the Kellogg's *Special K* "look good on your own terms" advertising campaign. Students begin by reading about this award-winning, controversial campaign which uses humour to skewer traditional advertising stereotypes about thinness. Students will deconstruct a series of *Special K* ads and discuss how marketers target "ideal beauty" messages to both men and women. Students will also look at the differences between the different marketing campaigns for *Special K* that have been used with Canadian and American women.

## Learning Outcomes

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Students will demonstrate:

- awareness of the media's role in promoting unattainable standards of attractiveness
- understanding of the role played by target audiences in the creation of advertising campaigns
- awareness of body image as an issue that affects both men and women

## Preparation and Materials

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Photocopy or make overheads of the following *Special K* advertisements:

- *Special K\* Ad 1*
- *Special K\* Ad 2*
- *Special K\* Ad 3*
- *Special K\* Ad 4*
- *Special K\* Ad 5*
- *Special K\* Ad 6*

Photocopy the following articles:

- *Food for Thought*
- *The Two Faces of Kellogg*
- *"Ideal-beauty" Message Now Also Aimed at Men?*



## Procedure

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### Background

Kellogg of Canada launched an unusual ad campaign in the fall of 1996 to promote *Special K* cereal. A series of three ads, attacking the fashion industry's ideal of beauty, were placed in English-speaking women's magazines. The ads lampoon society's obsession with extreme thinness, while stressing fitness and health as the key to a positive body image.

A spokesperson for Kellogg said the company decided to run the hard-hitting campaign after holding focus group sessions with young women between the ages of 18 and 26. The test groups expressed dissatisfaction with the media making women feel that they were never thin enough. They wanted to see a more well-rounded approach to health with an emphasis on feeling good about one's weight.

The company took a low-key approach to the campaign, tracking consumer response to the first two humorous ads before running a third, more serious, one. Because of the extremely positive public response, in 1997 Kellogg released another set of *Special K* ads in the same ironic vein, this time featuring television commercials as well as magazine advertisements.

As part of the "look good on your own terms" campaign, full-figured Canadian recording artist Jann Arden has appeared on *Special K* boxes. Another 1999 television spot featured Jacqueline Izzard, a six-foot tall, 200 pound firefighter from Toronto.

Since its launch, the campaign has collected numerous industry awards.

### Guided Discussion

- Give students a bit of background about the advertising campaign and then hand out copies of the ads (or show overhead transparencies) along with the article Food for Thought.

Let students read the article, and then discuss the ads:

- Are they effective?
- Is the message clear?
- This was considered a "risky" campaign. Initially, Kellogg ran "look good on your own terms" in English Canada only. Once the campaign appeared to be successful it was expanded to include Quebec and the United States. In what way is this campaign a risk for Kellogg?
- By appealing to the intelligence and sense of humor of consumers, will these ads will sell more cereal than traditional *Special K*\* ads which exploit insecurities consumers may have about their bodies?
- Who is this campaign targeted to? (Discuss how the "audience" for a marketing campaign influences content.)
- How much do viewers' values and knowledge influence the interpretation of this ad?

Distribute "Ideal-beauty" Message Now Also Aimed at Men? (Teachers should check the articles first to see if they are appropriate for their grade.)



One of the humorous television spots for this campaign features men in a bar obsessing about their bodies as if they are women: "I will not freak out if I gain two pounds" and "I will not let my dress size determine my worth." It's very funny, but researchers have found that body image obsession is no longer a women's issue.

Ask students:

- Do you think that body image is an important issue for men?
- When men worry about their bodies, what are they most likely to worry about?
- It's no secret that advertisers promote standards of attractiveness and thinness that are almost impossible for the average woman to attain. Would you say that this is true for men as well?
- Where is pressure for men to look a certain way most likely to come from?

Distribute *The Two Faces of Kellogg*.

- Why do you think Kellogg decided to use a more traditional campaign featuring Cindy Crawford in the United States?
- Cindy Crawford is considered to be statuesque for a super model, and she also has two children. Do you think that she is an appropriate role-model for the average woman?
- In this article, an American ad executive is quoted saying: "the key component missing [in the look good campaign] was the 'aspirational' aspect of wanting to look better, feel better than you actually are." Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Why or why not?
- Do you agree or disagree with the statement: "[Americans] truly do seem to buy into the "American dream" in all its forms, whereas we Canadians are just more willing to accept who we are and get on with it."
- Debate the question: "Is this apparent double-standard hypocrisy, or good business?"

### Activities

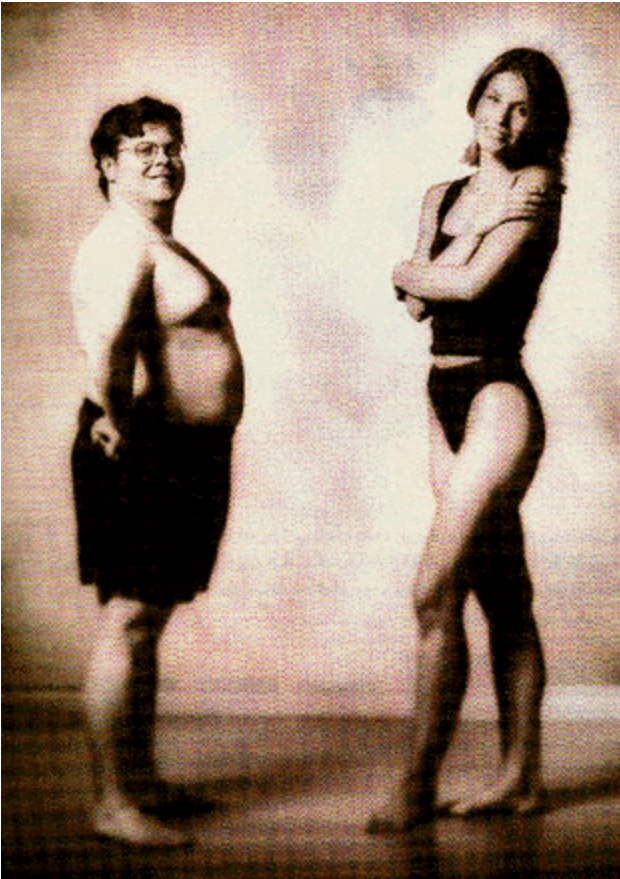
- Have students find cereal advertisements that use marketing messages that promote a thin body image. Compare the two approaches. Which ads do they like best? Which do they think are more effective?
- Using the "look good on your own terms" campaign as a model, have students create their own marketing campaign for a product, which challenges the traditional images of beauty used in advertising.
- If students would like to tell Kellogg what they think of the ads, have them send a letter, with their comments, to the company. Use this as an opportunity to find out how successful the marketing campaign has been for sales of *Special K*. Will they continue with this type of campaign in Canada?
- Research and write a report about issues relating to male or female body image.

To see RealVideo versions of the Special K\* TV commercials, check out the Kellogg Special K\* website.



## Special K Advertisement #1

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### IRONICALLY, SHE'S THE ONE WORRIED ABOUT HER WEIGHT

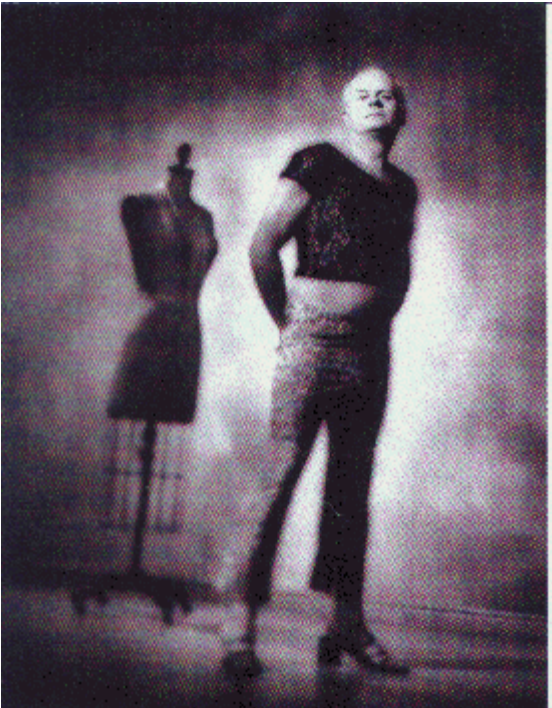
We're always the ones more likely to be concerned. Even when we have nothing to be concerned about. But looking your best is about being strong and healthy - not obsessive. Look good on your own terms. Exercise. Refuse to skip meals. Start with a balanced breakfast every morning and go from there. Kellogg's *Special K* cereal is low in fat and a source of essential nutrients so it's a light, sensible way to start your day. After all, there's no reason to let your weight control you. Especially if you're like her and have nothing to lose.



A healthy body weight looks good on everyone



## Special K Advertisement #2



### IF ONLY DESIGNERS HAD TO LIVE UP TO THE SAME STANDARDS THEY'VE SET FOR US

It's time the people who set appearance standards realized that looking your best is about being strong and healthy - not underweight. Look good on your own terms. Exercise. Refuse to skip meals. Start with a balanced breakfast every morning and go from there. Kellogg's *Special K* cereal is low in fat and a source of essentials so it's a light, sensible way to start your day. After all, if the standards you judge yourself by aren't your own, they shouldn't carry any weight.

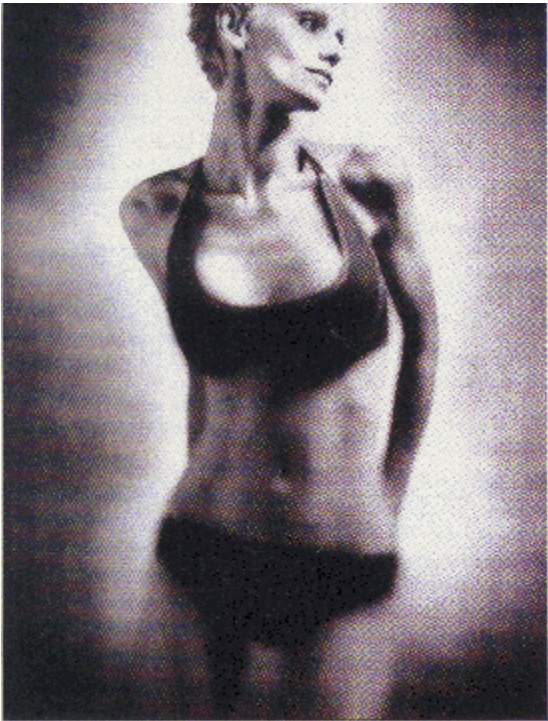


A healthy body weight looks good on everyone





### Special K Advertisement #3



#### IF THIS IS BEAUTY, THERE'S SOMETHING WRONG WITH THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

We see models like this all the time. But that doesn't mean we should equate being beautiful with being underweight. Look good on your own terms. Exercise. Refuse to skip meals. Start with a balanced breakfast every morning and go from there. Kellogg's *Special K* cereal is low in fat and a source of essential nutrients so it's a light, sensible way to start your day. After all, a healthy body weight should be beautiful in everyone's eyes. And there isn't one of us who should aspire to anything less.



A healthy body weight looks good on everyone



## Special K Advertisement #4

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### DON'T LET IT MEASURE YOUR SELF ESTEEM

It's unfortunate that something as insignificant as a tape measure can have such an impact on how we feel about ourselves. Don't let it. It can't measure who you are. Exercise. Refuse to skip meals. Start with a balanced breakfast every morning and go from there. Kellogg's *Special K* cereal is fat free and a source of nine essential nutrients so it's a light, sensible way to start your day. After all, looking your best is about being strong and healthy. And the standards you measure yourself by should be your own.



A healthy body weight looks good on everyone



## Special K Advertisement #5

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### A WOMAN'S VALUE SHOULD NOT BE DETERMINED BY THE POUND

Unfortunately, the more a woman weighs, the less she perceived to be worth. Our value as human beings, however, should have nothing to do with the numbers on a scale. The fact is, we should aspire to a healthy body weight and nothing less. So exercise. Establish a healthy routine. Start with a balanced breakfast every morning and go from there. Kellogg's *Special K* cereal is fat free and a source of nine essential nutrients so it's a light, sensible way to start your day. After all, looking your best is about being strong and healthy. And in the end, every one of us is priceless.



A healthy body weight looks good on everyone





## Special K Advertisement #6



**THE ASHANTIS OF GHANA THINK A WOMAN'S BODY GET MORE ATTRACTIVE AS SHE AGES.**

**Please contact your travel agent for the next available flight.**

A 50-year-old's body looks more attractive than a 20-year-old's? Why not? Its only perception after all. In every culture, our bodies change as we age. Wouldn't it be nice if ours were to celebrate the process? Exercise. Establish a healthy routine. Start with a balanced breakfast every morning and go from there. Kellogg's *Special K* cereal is a fat free and a source of nine essential nutrients so it's a light, sensible way to start your day. At any age, looking your best is about being strong and healthy. Which is important if you expect to be travelling in the near future.



A healthy body weight looks good on everyone



## Food for Thought

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This editorial is reproduced with permission from [Marketing Magazine](#), Oct. 21, 1996.

The proliferation over the past decade of malnourished-looking women flogging everything from jeans and T-shirts to designer perfumes in advertising would seem to have a desensitizing effect on consumers. How ironic it is, then, that a new print campaign by Kellogg Canada Ltd. for its *Special K* cereal that shows an almost skeletal, bikini-clad model, is so disturbing. The startling image, one of three executions in the campaign, is the last thing one would expect from the breakfast-cereal manufacturer that at one time chastised consumers for pinching an inch.

While many have paid lip service to the principal of portraying women more realistically in advertising, Kellogg scores a direct hit at society's destructive ultrathin-is-beautiful myth. Although Kellogg is itself guilty of spinning the body-beautiful fantasy in prior *Special K* ads - the TV spot featuring a middle-aged woman, with a knock-out figure, flirting with her husband comes to mind - the latest *Special K* message at least promotes a healthy body weight through exercise and sensible diet.

What makes the new *Special K* campaign so effective is that it respects the intelligence of its mostly female audience, and uses humor to effect: "Ironically, she's the one worried about her weight" reads the copy alongside a photo of a woman and a smug looking man so bloated his breast size rivals hers. Another execution shows a middle-aged man looking ridiculous in leopard-print pants and a tummy hugging lace blouse. "If only fashion designers had to live up to the same standards they've set for us," reads the copy.

This type of "we care about you" ad is responsible and gets people talking: not only about the role that advertising, the media and the fashion industry play in the development of the self-images of young women; but it also about the dearth of ads that so deftly engages the intelligence and sensibilities of the customer. A cereal ad about body weight and self-image speaks to women of any age and has more to do with the food product Kellogg is selling than, for instance, John Lennon's butt has to do with wrist watches.

Yet Kellogg is clearly reticent to talk about details of the campaign. The company says it doesn't want to reveal the strategy because it's based on proprietary consumer research. Kellogg appears to be taking a wait-and-see approach: if the campaign's a hit they may extend it. If it evokes more outrage than kudos, Kellogg will likely take it off the shelf.

Kellogg's silence is perhaps understandable. After all, most marketers are uncomfortable being seen as leading the way on social issues. Realistically, the ads probably won't convince women to resign contentedly from the diet game. And time will tell whether Kellogg sells more boxes of *Special K* because of it. Closer to the truth, however, is that the highly competitive adult breakfast-cereal market is still rather conservative and Kellogg is testing uncharted waters. They deserve praise for it.



## “Ideal-beauty” Message Now Also Aimed at Men

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By Antonia Zerbislas

Reproduced with permission courtesy *The Toronto Star Syndicate*

There's a Kellogg's *Special K* ad in many women's magazines this month.

Nothing new in that.

But, instead of the usual frisky model scarfing down flakes while pumping iron and the baby, this particular ad shows a bony, bikinied body.

"If this is beauty, there's something wrong with the eye of the beholder." reads the copy, which goes on to make the pitch that "a healthy body weight, should be beautiful inn anyone's eyes" and that the cereal will help you healthfully lose weight.

"Talk about mixed messages, especially considering the much-more-powerful signals sent out on the surrounding pages. In too many magazines, women read that they can never be young enough, busty enough, and most important, thin enough.

Perhaps it's the pose, the lighting, the makeup, but the *Special K* model looks, aside her incongruously ample breasts (ain't it always so?), hideous. Not that she's skinnier than the current crop of dress hangers in the February File, to take just one example.

But because the picture isn't flattering and she isn't draped in \$1 million worth of Mizrahu, she looks like, well, let's just say "prisoner of war" comes to mind.

Feminists have long complained about waif models, but their protests are usually ignored, both by the fashion industry and the general media.

The female stars of *Friends* all wear Size 4. The only chubby chicks you see on TV, except for Rosie O'Donnell, are losers on *Riki Lake* and *Jerry Springer*. Men are just starting to feel the same pressure. With men's health and fashion magazines proliferating, Calvin Klein producing more buff male ads, male movie stars pumping and liposucking and good looks becoming career requirements in the toughened-up job market, men are being subjected to more and more impossible physical ideas.

So it's no wonder the January/February issue of *Psychology Today* reports some people at war with their bodies are willing to die younger, if they can leave a thinner corpse.

The "1997 Body Surgery" indicates that "15 per cent of women and 11 per cent of men say they would sacrifice more than five years if their lives for the weight they want".

"Twenty-four per cent of women and 7 per cent of men say they would give up more than three years."

Staying slim had become such a issue for women that some of them are passing up on parenting so as not to ruin their figures.

"Pregnancy," writes David M. Garner in the 16-page article: "is increasingly being seen not as a normal body function but as an encumbrance to body image."



And from where do these ideas come?

It's no longer possible to deny the fact that images of models in the media have a terrible effect on how women see themselves." Writes Garner. "Women who have eating disorders are most influenced by fashion models."

Tracing the survey results over the years, *Psychology Today* conducted similar surveys in 1972 and 1985, it quickly becomes clear that contradictions between the culture's thinning body ideals and the fattening of fast-food menus are making us very unhappy, indeed.

For example, "only" 49 per cent of women responded in 1972 hated their thighs. Today the percentage has shot to 61. Twenty five years ago, 36 per cent of men were dissatisfied with their abdomens. Today, 63 percent think their pots have gone to pot.

The good news? Satisfying sex helps improve body image, no matter how much bounce you have to the ounce. Notes Garner, "Good sexual experiences breed high levels of body satisfaction.

Only trouble is, if fat is considered so freaky, how do you go about getting those "good sexual experiences"?

The magazines, while offering some solutions to the body image problem, doesn't say.

