

Body Image of Older Adults in Magazine Advertisements: A Content Analysis of Their Body Shape and Portrayal

By Tom Robinson and Mark Callister, Brigham Young University

Abstract

Because body disturbance, eating disorders, and the drive for thinness can all affect older individuals, the images they see in the media can have a lasting impression. This study looks at how national magazine advertisements portray older adults in terms of their body image and their physical and mental characteristics. The findings indicate that their images in national magazines are healthy, happy, and of average body weight. While the images are positive, social comparison and cultivation theories suggest the potential for some older people to make comparisons to these mediated images, which may lead to eating disorders, feelings of inadequacy, or dissatisfaction.

Introduction

As the baby boomers age, the number of Americans over 65 is predicted to increase to more than 86 million by the year 2050 (Federal Interagency Forum, 2006; U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). This population growth is due in part, to increases in the average life expectancy. With modern advancements in medicine and the increased availability of information on living healthy, Americans are taking better care of themselves, eating healthier, exercising more, and seeing their doctors on a regular basis (Wellner, 2003). For example, a male born in 1995 can, on average, expect to live to be 71 and a female to 79. These numbers are expected to continue to increase with the average life expectancy predicted to be 79 years for males and 84 years for females by the year 2050 (Hoyert, Kung, & Smith, 2005). Even with increased life expectancy and healthier lifestyles, negative stereotypes and attitudes toward older adults, their ways of thinking, and their abilities persist (Wellner, 2003). The media continues to portray older people as “institutionalized, in poor health, senile, constipated, incontinent, and either extremely poor or very wealthy” (Deets, 1993, p. 134). Research has found that when older individuals are exposed to these negative images they tend to internalize and believe them (Hummert, 1990; Levy, 1996, 2000).

Studies have shown that negative images of aging can have a powerful psychological and physiological impact on older people. A Harvard Medical School study found that viewing either positive or negative images of aging had a significant effect on older people’s ability to walk (Hausdorff, Levy, & Wei, 1999). Older individuals who were shown positive images walked faster and appeared spryer, while older individuals who were shown negative images walked more slowly and more hunched over. Gunter and Wykes (2005) note, “an important psychological mechanism that may underpin mediated influences upon body self-perceptions is the tendency for individuals to make comparisons between themselves and the role models” (p. 154). These media images compete with real-life role models as the predominant source for body comparisons among both men and women (Gunter & Wykes, 2005).

For older individuals who are frequent media consumers, these images may form the basis for many conceptions of the ideal body image. Gunter and Wykes (2005) state that “exposure to the media-portrayed thin ideal is related to eating pathology and suggests that women may directly model disordered eating behavior presented in the media” (p. 161).

However, women are not the only ones affected by media portrayals. Research indicates that males experience body image disturbance (the “muscular body”) as frequently as do females (the “thin body”) (Cohane & Pope, 2001). In fact, as men age, their feelings of unattractiveness increase, “suggesting that the body image of males is more affected by the aging process” (Paxton & Phythian, 1999, p. 119), and according to Kaminski and Hayslip (2006) “older men are more likely than older women to disparage their appearance as they age” (p. 33). The purpose of this study, therefore, is to explore the body image portrayals and the physical and personality characteristics of both older men and older women in advertisements found in national magazines.

Review of Literature

Research has found that body disturbance, eating disorders, and the drive for thinness—conditions generally associated with adolescent and college-age women—do occur in older individuals (Wills & Olivieri, 1998; Zerbe, 2003). Hsu and Zimmer (1988) found in their research “that the clinical picture of eating disorders in the elderly resembles closely that in younger patients” (p. 137). The psychological and physical changes a person goes through during the aging process and menopause are much like to the changes an adolescent goes through during puberty and menarche and all have been found to produce eating and weight-related disorders (Gupta, 1990; Lewis & Cachelin, 2001). Researchers have discovered that with older persons, the onset of an eating disorder may be triggered by a fear of growing old, a fear of gaining weight, a major separation (such as the death of a loved one), a delayed adolescent crisis, a highly restrictive diet, denying an illness, a prior eating disorder, or the social pressures to be thin (Gupta, 1990; Hsu & Zimmer, 1988; Paxton & Phythian, 1999; Price, Giannini, & Colella, 1985).

Hsu and Zimmer (1988) observed that even older women are giving in to the social pressure to be slender. In fact, the concerns most women experience regarding aging focus on body image and attractiveness. These concerns can “lead the woman at midlife to feel just as dissatisfied with herself and her body as a younger woman” (Zerbe, 2003, p. 81). The social pressures perpetuated by the media include concerns about growing old, the desire to stay young, and the idea that being thin helps maintain a young, attractive, more sexual appearance (Lewis & Cachelin, 2001). Park (2005) reported in her review of literature that studies “have consistently identified the sociocultural emphasis on thinness as the likely primary cause of the development of these disorders [anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa]” (p. 595). The research does provide evidence that older women are just as susceptible as teens to the sociocultural emphasis on thinness, an emphasis that is further reinforced through consumption of images and messages from the media (Hsu & Zimmer, 1988; Lewis & Cachelin, 2001; Park, 2005; Zerbe, 2003).

Media portrayals of health and fitness

Relevant research in media content has observed several trends in how magazines and television cover health and fitness-related issues. For example, in a content analysis of the top-rated women’s magazines published from 1959 to 1989, researchers reported an increase in the number of diet and exercise articles and that the ideal body size for women grew thinner over time (Wiseman, Gray, Mosimann, & Ahrens, 1992). Such findings mirror a similar pattern in the messages of teen magazines, which often lead young women to believe that beauty and success are related to being thin and staying slim (Evans, Rutberg, Sather, & Turner, 1991). Another content analysis of women’s magazines covering a period of 27 years found that food advertisements had significantly increased their health and weight-loss claims (Klassen, Wauer, & Cassel, 1991). Similar research reports that the majority of products advertised by older characters center on health-related products, followed by

insurance and financial services (Bramlett-Solomon & Subramanian, 1999; Robinson, 1998).

Beyond media portrayals of physical health and fitness, researchers have also examined how media portrays the mental health and personality of older individuals (Bramlett-Solomon & Subramanian, 1999; McConatha, Schnell, & McKenna, 1999; Miller, Miller, McKibbin, & Pettys, 1999; Robinson, 1998). Using content analyses of advertisements in top-circulating magazines, these studies found that, overall, the advertisements contained positive portrayals of older characters and that each magazine contained only a small number of negative stereotypes regarding senior citizens. For instance, Miller et al. (1999) reported that no older characters were portrayed as “recluse, vulnerable, severely impaired or despondent” (p. 333). Robinson (1998) stated that 46.4% of the older characters were portrayed as happy and content and that most (68.3%) were shown outdoors.

Media effects on self-image

Two important theories relevant to the potential impact of media images and messages that affect older individuals' self-image are social comparison theory and cultivation theory. Social comparison theory states that people establish their personal identity through making comparisons between others believed to be similar to them (Festinger, 1954). The theory assumes that individuals make comparisons with individuals they see as ideal or desirable for which they then compare their own successes and abilities. Many of the models and celebrities seen in the media can become sources for making unrealistic comparisons. Although these comparisons have been shown in some cases to lead to short-term increases in motivation for self-improvement, they typically result in long-term discouragement, negative effects, and body image disturbance—particularly when the comparisons lead to the realization that the ideal portrayed in the media is difficult, if not impossible, to obtain (Thomsen, 2002).

Research in social comparison theory has found that the more comparisons made, the more dissatisfaction people feel toward their own body (Gunter & Wykes, 2005). There does seem to be a difference in the way that men and women compare themselves to media images. For example, men are not as likely as women to make upward comparisons with media models (Gunter & Wykes, 2005). Upward comparisons are comparisons to others who are believed to be better off than us. These comparisons generally lead to negative feelings and negative self-evaluations (Gibbons & Gerard, 1989; Wheeler & Miyake, 1992, as cited in Bessenoff, 2006). Researchers have found that individuals who have body image self-discrepancy are more likely to engage in body comparisons and are more vulnerable to the effects of these comparisons (Bessenoff, 2006). Because both older men and older women are heavy consumers of the media, they are inundated with what the media's sees as the ideal body image.

The second theory that helps explain the media's effects on body disturbance is cultivation theory. According to this theory, the media has a significant impact in shaping, or “cultivating,” people's views of social reality. Cultivation theory holds, therefore, that individuals who spend a considerable amount of time involved with media images are more likely to be influenced by how the media depicts social reality. Repeated exposure to stereotypical images cultivates beliefs, assumptions, and common conceptions of societal facts and norms, and such exposure can influence individual conceptions of reality, standards, judgment, attitudes, thoughts, and behavior (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli 1994). Therefore, individuals who are heavily exposed to images of models and celebrities with ideal bodies may have a distorted view of what is an

acceptable and normal body image. This can be especially true for individuals whose real-life experiences are easily compared with the experiences portrayed in the media.

With this background in mind, this study explores the images of older people as portrayed in popular general-interest magazines. Of particular interest are the possible recurring images, or portrayal patterns, of older people in terms of physical, mental, and personality characteristics. Understanding how magazines present older people to the reading public can provide important insights into the nature of the images from which older people may make comparisons and others may form perceptions and attitudes.

The following research questions will guide this inquiry:

RQ1: How many older people are pictured in advertisements from top general-interest magazines?

RQ2: How are older people portrayed in terms of their level of physical activity, health status, and physical appearance in advertisements in top general-interest magazines?

RQ3: How are older people portrayed in terms of their mental health and disposition in the advertisements in top general-interest magazines?

RQ4: What body image of older people is portrayed in advertisements from top general-interest magazines?

RQ5: How are older minorities represented in advertisements from top general-interest magazines, and what is their body image?

RQ6: Is the overall portrayal of older characters in advertisements from top general-interest magazines positive or negative?

Methodology

Magazines were selected for the content analysis because researchers have found that the relationship between eating disorders and magazine reading was stronger than for other media types (Gunter & Wykes, 2005). The unit of analysis for this study is each older person appearing in the magazine advertisements from the eight national, general-interest magazines with the highest older adult readership. Circulation numbers were taken from the 2004 Mediamark Research Inc. (MRI) report. Mediamark is the leading provider of syndicated consumer magazine audience data in the United States. The national magazines selected were *Reader's Digest*, *Better Homes and Gardens*, *People*, *National Geographic*, *AARP The Magazine*, *TV Guide*, *Family Circle*, and *Time*. One issue from each month, November 2004 through October 2005, was coded. For weekly magazines, the last issue of each month was selected for examination. Because *AARP The Magazine* is published bimonthly, the past 12 issues were selected for coding. From the total of 96 issues, all full-page advertisements were analyzed, and each older person was coded. There was no attempt to control for duplication of advertisements, as many advertisers utilize repetition to achieve brand recognition.

To better understand the portrayal of older characters and what body image is presented by advertisers in national magazines, two independent coders were trained to identify all older characters in the advertisements using the following subjective criteria: (a) an appearance of retirement, (b) extensive gray/white hair, (c) wrinkles of the skin in hands and face, (d) extensive loss of hair or balding, (e) use of an ambulatory aid such as a cane or wheelchair, (f) evidence of being the parent of a middle-aged son or daughter, or (g) evidence

of having grandchildren or great-grandchildren (Bishop & Krause, 1984; Gantz, Gartenberg, & Rainbow, 1980; Peterson, 1992; Robinson, 1998; Robinson & Anderson, 2006; Swayne & Greco, 1987). A character was considered old if he or she met one or more of these criteria. Only those older people whose faces and/or bodies were shown and could be identified by age and gender were counted. Older celebrity endorsers were not counted because “celebrities are nearly always depicted in positive terms and are not representative of the population as a whole” (Miller et al., 1999, p. 326).

The coders were then instructed to code the character’s role, their level of activity, their health status, their physical appearance, their mental health and disposition, their race, and their body image (see Appendix A). The list of roles, physical characteristics, and mental health and disposition traits was assembled from an extensive review of literature (Dellmann-Jenkins, 1997; Guerrero, DeVito & Hecht, 1999; Hummert, Garstka, Shaner, & Strahm, 1994; Peterson, 1992; Robinson, 1998; Robinson & Anderson, 2006; Swayne & Greco, 1987; Ursic, Ursic, & Ursic, 1986). The body image of each of the characters was determined by comparing the character’s body size to Thompson and Gray’s (1995) Contour Drawing Rating Scale. The drawing scale provides images (from “very thin” to “obese”) that the coders could easily match to the images in the magazine advertisements.

The coders were instructed on how to recognize possible problems in judgment that might occur during the coding process and a coding sheet was devised to assist in noting information about each of the images. In an attempt to minimize any coder bias in the findings, after an intercoder reliability check was made, the data from each coder were compared and one set of data was produced for analysis purposes. Any questions or discrepancies that arose during the process were discussed by the coders and corrected. When a disagreement did arise, the coders were allowed to view the advertisement in question again so a decision could be made. To determine intercoder reliability, Holsti’s (1969) reliability formula was used to calculate agreement for the approximate age of the older characters (83% agreement in three age categories), the characters’ level of activity (98% agreement in three activity level categories), the characters’ health status (89% agreement in three health status categories), two randomly selected physical appearance attributes (wrinkles, 98% agreement & hair color, 100% agreement), two randomly selected mental health and disposition attributes (happy/content, 85% agreement & loving/caring, 88% agreement), the characters’ race (97% agreement), and the characters’ body image (93% agreement).

Finally, an evaluation was made of each character’s overall portrayal as either positive or negative. This methodology followed the positive and negative dimensions established by Schmidt and Boland (1986), who defined negative stereotypes of older people as “despondent, mildly impaired, vulnerable, severely impaired, shrew/curmudgeon, recluse, nosey neighbor and bag lady/vagrant” and positive stereotypes of older people as “John Wayne conservative, liberal matriarch/patriarch, perfect grandparent, and sage” (p. 258). Decisions about the positive or negative portrayal of a character were made after considering all physical and personality traits and body image.

Results

From the eight magazines coded, there were 4,698 advertisements, of which 2,219 had people and 290 (13.1%) contained at least one older person (see Table 1).

Magazine	Total Number of Ads	Number of Ads with People	Number of Ads with Older People	
<i>TV Guide</i>	214	86	29	33.7%
<i>Readers Digest</i>	640	256	33	12.9%
<i>AARP The Magazine</i>	116	134	70	52.2%
<i>Better Homes & Gardens</i>	1,401	675	61	9.0%
<i>People</i>	683	345	16	4.6%
<i>National Geographic</i>	285	131	14	10.7%
<i>Family Circle</i>	795	373	24	6.4%
<i>Time</i>	420	219	46	21.0%
Total	4,554	2,219	290	13.1%

As expected, *AARP The Magazine* had the largest number of advertisements with an older character (52.2%), but *TV Guide* (33.7%) and *Time* (21.0%) also had large percentages (see Table 1). *Better Homes and Gardens* (9.0%), *Family Circle* (6.4%), and *People* (4.6%) had a lower percentage of advertisements with an older character, which may be a reflection of the younger target audience of these magazines. There were a total of 3,923 people in the advertisements and 280 (7.1%) older individuals (see Table 2). The 280 excluded 63 older celebrities that were not coded. Again, *AARP The Magazine* (40.4%) had the largest number of older people in their advertisements, and *People* (1.5%) had the fewest number.

Magazine	Total Number of People	Number of Older People	
<i>TV Guide</i>	164	16	9.8%
<i>Readers Digest</i>	640	39	6.1%
<i>AARP The Magazine</i>	218	88	40.4%
<i>Better Homes & Gardens</i>	1,128	67	5.9%
<i>People</i>	723	11	1.5%
<i>National Geographic</i>	200	14	7.0%
<i>Family Circle</i>	642	26	4.0%
<i>Time</i>	392	19	4.8%
Total	3,923	280	7.1%

Physical Description of the Older Characters

Fifty-six percent of the older people were male and 44% were female. The racial makeup of the older characters was 84.7% Caucasian, 13.2% African American, 1.3% Asian, 0.3% Hispanic, and 0.6% coded as other. The characters were seen most often as being in their 60s (60.3%), with 27.9% in their 50s and 11.8% in their 70s or above. The portions of the body shown in the advertisements were distributed evenly between full body (30.3%), partial body (38.5%), and head only (31.2%).

The older characters' activity level was primarily inactive (60.3%), which included all portrayals where the older person was sitting, standing, or posing for the camera; however, 39.7% were shown as either active (e.g., walking, gardening, shopping, yoga) or very active (e.g., jogging, bicycling, swimming, surfing). The health status of the older characters was overwhelmingly "good" (97.4%), with only 2.6% of the characters shown with "minor limitations" and no portrayals of older adults with "poor or declining health." The older characters were shown with a limited amount of wrinkles (73.1%), a moderate physical appearance (91.4%), not in need of glasses (90.0%), and not using a physical aid such as a wheelchair, cane, or walker (98.6%). Only 2% of the males were shown as bald or balding, and 77.4% of the males and females had gray hair. The older characters were cast in a number of positive roles, including a model/spokesperson (57.2%), a grandparent (14.5%), a husband or wife (9.0%), a worker or boss (7.2%), and a parent to a middle-aged adult (4.8%). They were pictured most often outdoors (34.5%) and in the home (14.5%).

Personality and Mental Description of the Older Characters

Overall, the mental and personality traits of the older characters were positive. Eighty-three percent were shown as happy and content, 23.4% as friendly, 15.9% as loving, and 15.2% as intelligent. Only a small number of the older characters had negative characteristics, such as angry or grumpy (3.8%), or sad (0.3%), and there were no characters shown as forgetful, senile, eccentric, overly affectionate, helpless, nosey, or lonely.

Body Image of the Older Characters

Body image was only calculated on those characters whose partial body or full body was shown in the advertisements. Advertisements that displayed the head only were not coded leaving 189 characters' body image coded. The body image of the older characters was predominantly average (80.4%), with only a small percentage of the characters shown as either thin (4.8%) or overweight (14.8%). When the body image numbers are broken down by gender (see Table 3), the percentage of underweight and overweight females does slightly increase, but the largest percentage are still of average weight.

Gender	Thin		Average		Overweight		Total
Male	3	2.9%	85	82.5%	15	14.6%	103
Female	6	7.0%	67	77.9%	13	15.1%	86
Total	9	4.8%	152	80.4%	28	14.8%	189

Table 4 shows the body image numbers divided by race. The largest percentage (86.9%) of the Caucasians were shown with an average body weight, and only a small percentage were shown as either underweight (4.9%) or overweight (8.2%). However, the 26 older African American characters were divided evenly between average (53.8%) and overweight (46.2%). The only Asian character was portrayed as overweight, and the only Hispanic character was shown with head only so body image was not measured.

Race	Thin		Average		Overweight		Total
Caucasian	9	5.6%	137	85.1%	15	9.3%	103
African American	0		14	53.8%	12	46.2%	26
Asian	0		0		1	100.0%	1
Hispanic	0		0		0		0
Other race	0		1	100.0%	0		1
Total	9	4.8%	152	80.4%	28	14.8%	189

Overall Portrayal of the Older Characters?

The variable the coders were asked to determine, based on the overall representation of the older character, was if the characters' portrayals were positive or negative. The results (see Table 5) indicate that 333 of the characters (97.9%) had an overall positive portrayal and seven of older characters (2.1%) were portrayed in a negative manner. *Time*, *Reader's Digest*, and *Better Homes and Gardens* were the only magazines that contained a negative portrayal.

Magazine	Positive	Negative
<i>TV Guide</i>	16	0
<i>Readers Digest</i>	37	2
<i>AARP The Magazine</i>	88	0
<i>Better Homes & Gardens</i>	66	1
<i>People</i>	11	0
<i>National Geographic</i>	14	0
<i>Family Circle</i>	26	0
<i>Time</i>	15	4
Total	273 (97.5%)	7 (2.5%)

Discussion

The purpose of this study, in addition to building upon the research of Robinson (1998), Bramlett-Solomon and Subramanian (1999), Miller et al. (1999), and McConatha et al. (1999) on the physical and mental characteristics of older characters, was to determine what body image of older men and women appear in national magazines. As found in the earlier research, older characters are underrepresented in the number of advertisements in which they appear and in terms of their total numbers. The 2000 United States Census data reports that the number of adults 65 years and older was 12.4% of the population. Older characters did appear in 13.1% of the advertisements, which is a large increase from studies conducted in the 1980s that reported percentages of less than 5% (Gantz, Gartenberg, & Rainbow, 1980; Kvasnicka, Beymer, & Perloff, 1982).

Older characters were, however, underrepresented in the total number of people appearing in the advertisements (7.1%). While they were in a larger number of advertisements, their total number is well below their actual numbers in the population.

Other researchers who also found that the older population was underrepresented in advertising, concluded that the advertisers must not see the older population as major players in the consumer market (Gantz et al., 1980; Peterson, 1992; Robinson, Duet, & Smith, 1995; Swayne & Greco, 1987). They did advertise a wide variety of products (e.g., entertainment, food, automobiles, retail stores, and electronics); however, 50% of the products that featured an older character were for medicines and medical related products, and an additional 5% were for insurance and financial institutions.

As was found in earlier research, the older character in this study were presented in a positive manner even though the 97.5% positive portrayals. Even the physical and mental characteristics have stayed consistently positive over the past few years. Researchers have been concerned that if advertisers continually portray older adults in a negative manner that the images could have detrimental effects on the images older adults have of themselves (Hausdorff, Levy, & Wei, 1999). The results of this study clearly indicate that in magazines with a large older adult readership, a negative image of older people hardly exists. The older characters in this sample of magazines were primarily portrayed as grandparent or spouse, white, in their 60s, of an average physical appearance, gray hair, limited wrinkles, not in need of glasses, happy and content, in good health, physically active, outdoors, and of an average body weight.

One area of concern is the overrepresentation of older Caucasians (84.7) who make up about 60% of the 55+ population, and the underrepresentation older minorities. Older African Americans were slightly underrepresented, with 13.2% appearing in magazine advertisements in comparison to 14.8% of the U.S. population. Older Hispanics were grossly underrepresented as they make up 10.3% of the U.S. population but comprised less than 1% (0.3%) of the older characters in magazine advertisements. Older Asians are also extremely underrepresented as they make up 14.7% of the older population, yet they represented only 1.3% of the older characters.

With the majority of the older characters having a body image that is considered average and with only a few outliers shown as very thin or overweight, this research clearly indicates what body type is considered by the advertisers to be a normal size. Research on body image disturbance that focuses on the media-generated “idealized images” or “thin ideal” observes that these images do have an influence on young women who attempt to model these behaviors in order to look like actresses or models. Studies have shown that older women, who are subjected to an ideal female image in the media, can be affected the same as young women (Hsu & Zimmer, 1988).

As stated earlier, the social pressures felt and the mediated images seen by older women deal mostly with growing old, the desire to stay young, and that being thin will help them maintain a young, attractive appearance (Lewis & Cachelin, 2001). The results of this study clearly shows that advertising leans toward the “ideal image” of an older adult in the models they select for their advertisements. Carrying a responsibility to present products and services in a positive light, advertisers naturally create advertisements that establish positive associations through appealing portrayals. However, given the proclivity of older people to make comparisons from media images of peers and the potential for many to suffer from these comparisons in terms of eating disorders, feelings of inadequacy and dissatisfaction, a concern arises over the prevalence of the “ideal” body image that abounds in these portrayals. The concern is most pronounced for older adults who are heavy magazine readers. For such readers, the cumulative message from these magazines is one in which most older people are living vibrant, healthy, content, socially active lives and doing so in a fit and functioning body. In some respects this is good news, especially given research showing that many mediated sources have placed older people in harmful and negatively stereotypical depictions.

However, the concern rests with older readers who are susceptible to unfair and personally harmful social comparisons that arise from the cultivation of these cumulative images.

Cultivation theory explains that because people use the mass media as a source for information and socialization, repeated portrayals can have a powerful and lasting effect on them (Gerbner et al., 1994). Therefore, just as negative images can have a negative effect on the viewer, a consistent stream of idealized images, over time, can have similar detrimental effects, especially for those older, overweight readers who may lean toward unrealistic and harmful social comparisons. Such readers may suffer from lower self body perception and feelings of inadequacy and dissatisfaction.

As noted in social comparison theory, individuals establish their personal identities by making comparisons between themselves and others who have specific, valued attributes they see as desired or normal. Thomsen (2002) found that although these comparisons can lead to some life changes, they often result in the person becoming discouraged and developing a negative self image. When the comparisons lead to the realization that the ideal image portrayed in the media is difficult, if not impossible, to obtain it may lead to the person developing body image disturbance.

This state of affairs poses a challenge for magazine advertisers who are driven to create effective magazine advertisements through surrounding and pairing their featured products with appealing, positive, and compelling images. However, advertisers also operate under the pressure, whether internally or externally applied, to create advertisements that reflect sensitivity to social issues and that do not negatively impact audiences that may experience certain vulnerabilities.

The emerging tension requires magazine advertising executions that reflect sensitivity to these issues, yet can still achieve desired outcomes. More realistic executions in which older characters of diverse body types, fitness levels, attractiveness, and physical capabilities are engaging in life events in a positive and appealing manner may carry an attractive force that more successfully resonates with older people. Arguably, such executions may find a more open audience and an audience that can more closely identify with images that do not trigger harmful comparisons, yet still accomplish advertising objectives.

References

- Bessenoff, G. R. (2006). Can the media affect us? Social comparison, self-discrepancy, and the thin ideal. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 30, 239–251.
- Bishop, J. M., & Krause, D. R. (1984). Depictions of aging and old age on Saturday morning television. *The Gerontologist*, 24(1), 91–94.
- Bramlett-Solomon, S., & Subramanian, G. (1999). Nowhere near picture perfect: Images of the elderly in *Life* and *Ebony* magazine ads, 1990–1997. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 76(3), 565–572.
- Cohane, G. H., & Pope, H. G. (2001). Body image in boys: A review of the literature. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 29(4), 373–379.
- Collins, A. L., & Smyer, M. A. (2005). The resilience of self-esteem in late adulthood. *Journal of Aging and Health*, 17(4), 471–489.

- Davis, R. H. & Davis, J. A. (1985). *TV's image of the elderly*. Lexington, KY: Lexington Books.
- Deets, H. B. (1993). The media and the mature marketplace. *Vital Speeches of the Day*, 60, 134–136.
- Dellmann-Jenkins, M. (1997). A senior-centered model of intergenerational programming with young children. *Journal of Applied Gerontology*, 16(4), 495–506.
- Erdwins, C. J., Mellinger, J. C., & Tyler, Z. E. (1981). A comparison of different aspects of self-concept for young, middle-aged, and older women. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 37, 484–490.
- Evans, E. D., Ruthberg, J., Sather, C., & Turner, C. (1991). Content analysis of contemporary teen magazines for adolescent females. *Youth & Society*, 23(1), 99–120.
- Federal Interagency Forum on Aging-Related Statistics. (2006). Older Americans update 2006: Key indicators of well-being – Health risks and behaviors. Retrieved on January 16, 2007, from <http://www.agingstats.gov/update2006/default.htm>
- Festinger, R. N. E. (1954). A theory of social comparisons. *Human Relations*, 7, 117-140.
- Gantz, W., Gartenberg, H. M., & Rainbow, C. K. (1980). Approaching invisibility: The portrayal of the elderly in magazine advertisements. *Journal of Communication*, 30, 56–60.
- Gerbner, G., & Gross, L. (1976). Living with television; the violence profile. *Journal of Communication*, 26, 173–199.
- Gerbner, G., Gross, L., Morgan, M., & Signorielli, N. (1994). Growing up with television: The cultivation perspective. In J. Bryant & D. Zillmann (Eds.), *Media Effects: Advances in Theory and Research* (pp. 17–41). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Gibbons, D. M., & Gerard, M. (1989). Effects of upward and downward social comparison on mood states. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 1, 14–31.
- Grove, W. R., Ortega, S. T., & Style, C. B. (1989). The maturational and role perspectives on aging and self though the adult years: An empirical study. *American Journal of Sociology*, 94(5), 1117–1145.
- Guerrero, L. K., De Vito, J. A., & Hecht, M. L. (1999). *The nonverbal communication reader: Classic and contemporary readings (2nd ed.)*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press Inc.
- Gunter, B., & Wykes, M. (2005). *The media and body image: If looks could kill*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc.
- Gupta, M. A. (1990). Fear of aging: A precipitating factor in late onset anorexia nervosa. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 9(2), 221–224.
- Harris, A. J., & Feinberg, J. F. (1977). Television and aging: Is what you see what you get? *The Gerontologist*, 17 (5), 464-468.

- Hausdorff, J. M., Levy B. R., & Wei, J. Y. (1999). The power of ageism on physical function of older persons: Reversibility of age-related gait changes. *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*, 47(11), 1346–1349.
- He, W., Sengupta, M., Velkoff, V. A., & DeBarros, K. A. (2005). *Current Populations, Special Report: 65+ in the United States: 2005*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Commerce.
- Holsti, O. (1969). *Content analysis for the social sciences and humanities*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Hoyert, D. L., Kung, H., & Smith, B. L. (2005). Deaths: Preliminary data for 2003. *National Vital Statistics Report*, 53(15), 1–48.
- Hsu, L. K. G., & Zimmer, B. (1988). Eating disorders in old age. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 7(1), 133–138.
- Hummert, M. L. (1990). Multiple stereotypes of elderly and young adults: A comparison of structure and evaluations. *Psychology and Aging*, 5(2), 182–193.
- Hummert, M. L., Garstka, T. A., Shaner, J. L., & Strahm, S. (1994). Stereotypes of the elderly held by young, middle-aged, and elderly adults. *Journal of Gerontology*, 49(5), 240–249.
- Kaminski, P. L., & Hayslip, B. (2006). Gender differences in body esteem among older adults. *Journal of Women & Aging*, 18(3), 19–35.
- Klassen, M. L., Wauer, S. M., & Cassel, S. (1991). Increases in health and weight loss claims in food advertising in the eighties. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 1990/1991, 32–37.
- Levy, B. (1996). Improving memory in old age through implicit self-stereotyping. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 71(6), 1092–1107.
- Levy, B. (2000). Handwriting as a reflection of aging self-stereotypes. *Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry*, 33, 81–94.
- Lewis, D. M., & Cachelin, F. M. (2001). Body image, body dissatisfaction, and eating attitudes in midlife and elderly women. *Eating Disorders*, 9, 29–39.
- McConatha, J. T., Schnell, F., & McKenna, A. (1999). Description of older adults as depicted in magazine advertisements. *Psychological Reports*, 85, 1051–1056.
- Miller, P. M., Miller, D. W., McKibbin, E.M., & Pettys, G. L. (1999). Stereotypes of the elderly in magazine advertisements, 1956–1996. *International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, 49(4), 319–337.
- Nehrke, M. F., Hulicka, I. M., & Morganti, J. B. (1980). Age differences in life satisfaction, locus of control, and self-concept. *International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, 11, 25–33.
- Park, S. (2005). The influence of presumed media influence on women's desire to be thin. *Communication Research*, 32(5), 594–614.
- Paxton, S. J., & Phythian, K. (1999). Body image, self-esteem, and health status in middle and late adulthood. *Australian Psychologist*, 34(2), 116–121.

- Peterson, R. T. (1992). The depiction of senior citizens in magazine advertisements: A content analysis. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 11(9), 701–706.
- Price, W. A., Giannini, A. J., & Colella, J. (1985). Anorexia nervosa in the elderly. *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*, 33(3), 213–215.
- Robinson, T. E., Duet, R., & Smith, T. V. (1995). The elderly in advertising: A content analysis of prime-time television commercials. *Proceedings of the 1995 Conference of the American Academy of Advertising* (pp. 1–11). Waco: Baylor University.
- Robinson, T. (1998). *Portraying older people in advertising: Magazines, television, and newspapers*. New York: Garland Publishing.
- Robinson, T. E., & Anderson, C. (2006). Older characters in children's animated television programs: A content analysis of their portrayal. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 50(2), 287–304.
- Ryff, C. D. (1989). Happiness is everything, or is it? Explorations on the meaning of psychological well-being. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 7, 507–517.
- Saucier, M. G. (2004). Midlife and beyond: Issues for aging women. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 82, 420–425.
- Schmidt, D. F., & Boland, S. M. (1986). Structure of perceptions of older adults: Evidence for multiple stereotypes. *Psychology and Aging*, 1(3), 255–260.
- Swayne, L. E., & Greco, A. J. (1987). The portrayal of old Americans in television commercials. *Journal of Advertising*, 16(1), 48–54.
- Thompson, M. A., & Gray, J. J. (1995). Development and validation of a new body image assessment scale. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 64(2), 258–269.
- Thomsen, S. R. (2002). Health and beauty magazine reading and body shape concerns among a group of college women. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 79(4), 988–1007.
- Trimakas, K. & Nicolay, R. (1974). Self-concept and altruism in old age. *Journal of Gerontology*, 29(4), 434–439.
- United States Census Bureau, (2006). *U.S. Interim Projections by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin*. Retrieved March 25, 2007, from <http://www.census.gov/ipc/www/usinterimproj/>
- Ursic, A. C., Ursic, M. L., & Ursic, V. (1986). A longitudinal study of the uses of the elderly in magazine advertising. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 13, 131–133.
- Wellner, A. (2003). Segmenting seniors. *American Demographics Forecast*, 23(3), 2–4.
- Wheeler, L., & Miyake, K. (1992). Social comparison in everyday life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 62, 760–773.
- Wills, A., & Olivieri, S. (1998). Anorexia nervosa in old age. *Aging & Mental Health*, 2(3), 239–245.

Wiseman, C. V., Gray, J. J., Mosimann, J. E., & Ahrens, A. H. (1992) Cultural expectations of thinness in women: An update. *International Journal of Eating Disorders*, 11(1), 85–89.

Zerbe, K. J. (2003). Eating disorders in middle and late life: A neglected problem. *Primary Psychiatry*, 10(6), 80–82.

Appendix A

Definitions of Character Roles

Role	Operational Definition
Husband/Wife	Person appears to be married to another person; appearance of cohabitation, children, grandchildren, physical proximity, or touching
Parent	Person shown in a family situation where he/she is the parent of a middle-aged child
Grandparent	Person shown in a family situation where he/she is the parent of a middle-aged person who is the parent of small children or teens
Worker/Boss	Person is working in a place of business where he/she is helping customers or serving others—the boss may own the business or have employees working under him/her
Friend	Person who has a close relationship with another person; they provide support and help to another person

Definition of Level of Activity

Activity Level	Operational Definition
Inactive	Person is not involved in any activity (e.g., sitting, standing, or posing for the camera)
Active	Person is involved in some kind of physical activity (e.g., walking, gardening, shopping, or doing yoga)
Very Active	Person is involved in strenuous physical activity (e.g., jogging, bicycling, swimming, or surfing)

Definition of Health Status

Health Status	Operational Definition
Good Health	Person is free from any apparent health problems
Minor Limitations	Person suffers from a minor health problem (e.g., backache, minor arthritis pain, or headache)
Poor Health	Person has a serious medical condition requiring the assistance of a doctor, nurse, or hospital

Definition of Physical Appearance

Appearance	Operational Definition
Ugly	Character is intentionally made up to not be physically appealing (e.g., messed up hair, shabby clothing, overly wrinkled, or toothless)
Moderate	The default—person is of average physical appeal and would be considered neither ugly nor overly attractive
Attractive	Character is intentionally made up to be overly physically appealing or beautiful (e.g., immaculate clothing and hair, perfect makeup, or desirable)

Definition of Mental Health and Disposition Characteristics

Trait	Operational Definition
Angry/Grumpy/Stern	Person who is annoyed or irritated, grumpy, bad-tempered or complains
Eccentric	An unconventional person or someone that is “over the top” in the way they act or react to situations
Forgetful	Forgetting small things like a person’s name, an appointment, or to take medication
Friendly	Caring about the well being of another person
Happy/Content	Showing contentment or joy
Helpful	Provides assistance, information, or aid to others
Helpless	Unable to manage without help from others
Humorous	A person with a humorous role or the one responsible for making a scene funny
Intelligent/Wise	Aware and informed—able to make decisions based on knowledge and experience
Lonely/Recluse	Isolated and rarely visited by family or friends
Loving/Caring	Showing genuine care or concern for others
Mean	Person who is cruel, unkind, or uncaring
Nosey	Overly curious about other people’s business
Object of ridicule	Person being made fun of
Overly Conservative	Believes in traditional values and against change
Overly Affectionate	A person whose affections are to the extreme—repeatedly kissing, hugging, or touching
Sad	Feeling unhappy or sorrowful—depressed
Senile/Crazy	Confused or mentally unaware or surroundings; erratic or unusual in behavior
Uncooperative	Unhelpful, stubborn, or obstinate