REVEALED:
The truth about airbrushing and advertising

GIRLS CHOOSE THE ADS THEY WANT TO SEE!

BIKINI SPECIAL!
Page 12

Pretty
as a picture

EXCLUSIVE PICTURES!

ADDICTED TO SOCIAL MEDIA?
GIRLS CONFESS ALL

Mums interviewed!
They tell us what they **REALLY** worry about

Pretty as a picture

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ABOUT THIS RESEARCH

Pretty as a Picture is a response to the increasing number of calls for changes to the way models are represented in adverts. These calls primarily focus on the potentially damaging impact of idealised imagery on the body confidence of young women.

What we want to bring to the debate are the views of consumers themselves. We began this project with the following four objectives in mind:

- **Establish the extent of any problem with body image/confidence**
- **See if girls can distinguish advertisements from content**
- **If they can, does it affect how they react to advertising?**
- **Explore practical solution(s) to any issues, if they exist**

For the answers to these questions turn to page 4

We hope you enjoy reading our report.

Methodology

Credos worked with Jo Rigby, Research Consultant, to interview 24 girls aged 10-18 and, separately, their Mums. The interviews took place between 25 May and 2 June 2011.

Credos commissioned Panelbase to conduct an online survey with a nationally-representative sample of 1000 girls aged 10-21 between 10-17 August 2011.

Glossary

- Young women: All 10-21-year-olds
- Pre-teens: 10-12-year-olds
- Early teens: 13-15-year-olds
- Mid-teens: 16-17-year-olds
- Young adults: 18-21-year-olds

Credos is advertising's independently-governed think tank, funded by the advertising industry, but overseen by an independent advisory board which assures the quality, objectivity and transparency of our work.

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Pretty as a Picture is the result of almost a year's research into the body confidence of young women, and how this relates to the images they see in advertising. We now have a solid evidence base on which decisions about these issues may be made.

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SO WHAT DID WE FIND ?

It's clear that body image and many forms of idealised imagery are big issues for young women. In focus groups, these topics came up spontaneously time and time again. Now, our *Pretty as a Picture* research reveals:

- **Young women are well aware of the term 'airbrushing'.**
  Some 84% understand what the word means, and have gathered most of their knowledge about airbrushing techniques from TV programmes and magazines.
- **Over half of young women take inspiration from adverts for their appearance.**
  53% agree with the statement 'I get ideas for how to look from advertising'.
- **Over a third (37%) of young women want to look like models they see in adverts.**
  This is despite the fact that 85% of young women recognise that sometimes the images in advertising have been altered using airbrushing. More worryingly, almost half (47%) agree with the statement 'Seeing adverts using thin models makes me want to diet/lose weight/feel more conscious of the way I look'.
- **Young women question brands which use airbrushing in their adverts.**
  Even the use of minor cosmetic airbrushing on models is rejected by 61% of young women, who think it is unacceptable for brands or products to use airbrushing to erase blemishes or spots on models in their advertising. The figure is far higher when it comes to the use of airbrushing in changing the body shape of a model in adverts: 84% of young women believe this is unacceptable.
- **Young women are less trusting of brands and products which use airbrushing to significantly alter the way a model looks.**
  48% agree that 'it makes me less inclined to believe what the brand/product is telling me'.
- **Young women favour images of models which haven't been airbrushed.**
  We showed them four images of the same model: one was completely natural, and the other three images were each airbrushed to various degrees. Some 40% would select the completely natural image (no airbrushing) to appear in an advert for women, or girls, like them. 78% describe this image as 'natural'; 35% describe it as 'beautiful'. See pages 10-14 for more details.

Tip for the ad industry: Credos research points towards public support for more diversity in advertising to include a range of sizes, shapes and skin tones.

"Even the use of minor cosmetic airbrushing on models is rejected by 61% of young women"

The important things in life

We wanted to know what makes young women happy, and what makes them worry. Specifically, we wanted to see whether appearance is a major concern for young women. Our research shows that young women say relationships with family and friends, and doing well at school, college or university, are far more important than the way they look. However, as we'll see later, their Mums aren't always convinced that this is the case.

What makes young women happy...

Young women of all ages generally agree that spending time with friends and family makes them happiest. The way they look doesn't feature highly on the list of things which they say make them happy, although 18% of pre-teens placed 'experimenting with hair and make-up' in the top three on a list of 15 pastimes.

Pre-teens' first choices

- Spending time with family (30%)
- Spending time with friends (20%)
- Having money (17%)

Early teens' first choices

- Spending time with friends (25%)
- Spending time with family (19%)
- Listening to music (11%)

Mid-teens' first choices

- Spending time with friends (26%)
- Spending time with family (19%)
- Boyfriend/ relationship (14%)

Young adults' first choices

- Boyfriend/relationships (28%)
- Spending time with family (23%)
- Spending time with friends (23%)

...and what makes them worry?

Young women of all ages say they tend to worry most about exams or having arguments with their family/friends. But this does differ according to their age. Younger girls are most worried about being bullied, having arguments with their family, and their safety. As expected, as girls get older they begin to worry more about exams, getting a job, and not having money. For mid-teenage girls, appearance is a top concern, but this becomes less important once they reach 18 years of age.

Looking to other sources, Youth TGI data indicate that appearance is less of a concern now for young women than two decades ago. Between 1993-1995, 57% of young women aged between 7-19 agreed with the statement 'I am happy with the way I look'. This number rose 5% by 2008-2010, when 62% of young women agreed with the statement. This suggests that although appearance is still a concern for some young women, their body confidence *may* be increasing.

Pre-teens' first choices

- Being bullied (24%)
- Arguments with family (19%)
- Crime – feeling safe (16%)
- Arguments with friends (11%)

Early teens' first choices

- Arguments with family (15%)
- Crime – feeling safe (14%)
- Exams (13%)

Mid-teens' first choices

- Exams (23%)
- Getting a job (15%)
- Crime (11%)
- Appearance (11%)

Young adults' first choices

- Getting a job (20%)
- Not having money (19%)
- Exams (15%)

All the young women that we surveyed are technologically well connected. Typically, the ownership of electrical goods increases with age and entering their teens marks a significant rise in possession of their own laptops and mobile phones.

Laptops

- Pre-teens – **75%**
- Early teens – **85%**
- Mid-teens – **94%**
- Young adults – **98%**

Mobile phone with internet

- Pre-teens – **43%**
- Early teens – **69%**
- Mid-teens – **84%**
- Young adults – **82%**

Mobile phone without internet

- Pre-teens – **44%**
- Early teens – **30%**
- Mid-teens – **22%**
- Young adults – **24%**

It's clear that young women have the means to share and communicate online. If they are talking about advertising and products then the implications for brand owners are potentially very great, so it was interesting to learn about the channels that they use to share their opinions.

From their early teens the majority of young women have an internet enabled phone. They can stay connected all the time.

Sharing information online – mid-teens lead the way

Young women in their mid-teens consistently appear to be most active online. Half of all young women have shared an advertiser's website link with a friend at some point in their lives, and 37% of mid-teens have done so in the last month.

Video

Similarly, when it comes to sharing an advertiser's video with a friend, just under half (46%) have done this, and mid-teens are most prolific (23% of mid-teens have done so in the last month).

Blogging

The same can be said for blogging: almost a third (31%) of young women have at some point written a blog, and it's most common among mid-teens – 21% of 16-17-year-olds have written a blog in the last month.

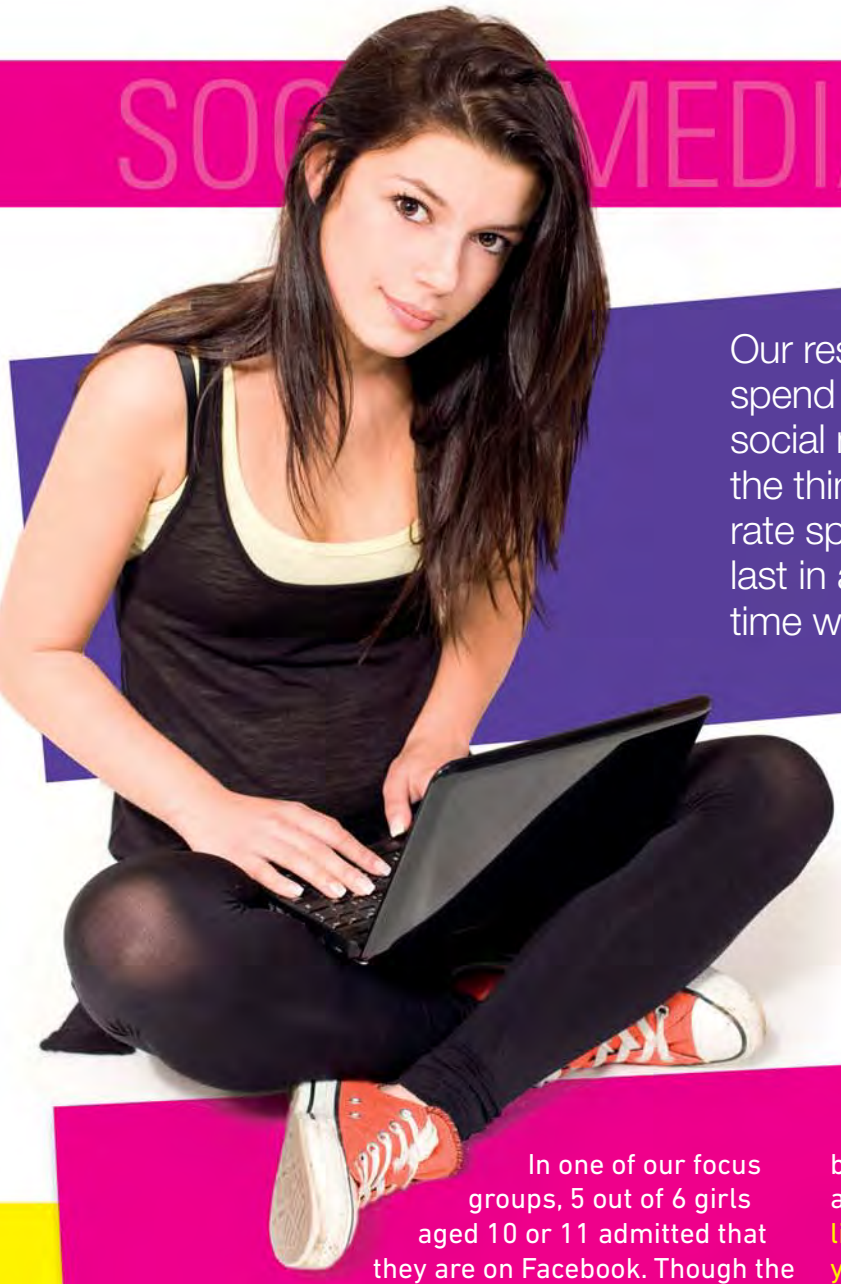
Commenting on blogs & websites

Some 44% of young women have commented on a blog at least once, and mid-teens are most likely to have done so recently (28% have done this in the last month). 39% of young women have written a comment on a website at some point, and this is highest among mid-teens (16% have done so in the last month).

Girls are generally positive – but are ready to rate brands online

Our research suggests that young women are more likely to post a positive comment about a product online than a negative comment. Nearly half (45%) of young women have posted a positive comment at some point, compared with 28% who have ever posted a negative comment. Once again, girls in their mid-teens are most likely to have done either of these in the last month – 26% have posted a positive comment and 10% have posted a negative comment.

These findings suggest that young women – particularly those in their mid-teens – who are pleased with a product or brand are willing to share their praise with the online world. Although they may be less likely to criticise brands online, they may well do so given sufficient reason. This means brands should continue to be wary of crossing the boundaries of what young women consider acceptable behaviour.



Our research showed that young women spend a significant amount of time using social media. But when asked to rank all the things that make them happy, they rate spending time on Facebook or Twitter last in a long list, way behind spending time with family or friends.

> "Half of pre-teens (51%) are on Facebook, although they should be aged 13 before they join."

In one of our focus groups, 5 out of 6 girls aged 10 or 11 admitted that they are on Facebook. Though the quantitative survey shows that the actual proportion is lower than the focus groups suggest, it still reveals that around half (51%) of pre-teens are on Facebook. Of these, 61% have already had Facebook for a year or more. In addition, almost 9 in 10 (89%) of girls in their early teens have a Facebook account; over half (55%) of whom have been on Facebook for 2-3 years.

Parents are often complicit in children under 13 using Facebook. Though they realise that their daughters have Facebook accounts "before they are supposed to sign up", Mums also recognise that their daughters – even those as young as 10 – feel socially excluded without a Facebook account.

This concern is also reflected in the Mums' observation of pre-teens' offline behaviour. Mums say the girls are delighted "when they are invited to things and they are happy when they are included". It's much the same online: girls want to be included in social activity. This seems to create an emotional conflict, and Mums describe how "it's like everyone else has been invited to a party and you're saying they can't go". As a result, few Mums feel able to completely restrict their daughter's access to Facebook.

Therefore, despite the fact that the minimum age for joining Facebook is 13, parents are willing to set their younger children up on the social networking site. This can, of course, bring associated problems. If at 8 years old girls register for Facebook by saying they are 13, then Facebook believes them to be five years older than they really are. By the time girls actually reach 13, they will be treated as if they are 18 and may then be served age-inappropriate ads for alcohol or cosmetic surgery.

SOCIAL MEDIASOCIAL MEDIA

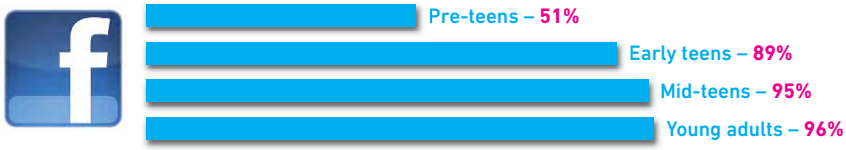
It is common for parents to supervise their daughters' use of social media. Some 80% of pre-teens claim that their parents monitor their use of Facebook and Twitter, as do almost half (49%) of early teenage girls. Predictably, this figure drops as girls get older, with just 7% of young adults agreeing that their use of social media is still monitored by their parents. Mums of 16-18-year-olds in our focus groups agree that they are usually blocked from seeing their daughters' profiles.

These figures vary according to social grade. Over one third (35%) of young women from DE backgrounds claim that their parents monitor their Facebook or Twitter accounts, compared with 29% from AB backgrounds.

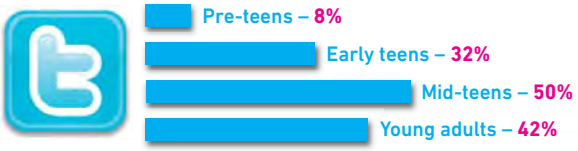
Young women are media multi-taskers. In our focus groups, they tell us that they are often on Facebook at the same time as they are watching TV.

Mums have a variety of ways of keeping tabs on their daughters' use of Facebook, including using their own email addresses to set up the accounts; making their daughters delete anyone older than them; knowing their passwords; telling other parents if they are concerned about their children's photographs or activity on Facebook; and asking 'insiders' to monitor their daughters for them. One Mum said "If I had a doubt I would close it".

Young women on Facebook:



Young women on Twitter:



Young women spend a large proportion of their social lives online. Mid-teenage girls spend most time on the social networking sites: almost a fifth (19%) admit that they spend more than 3 hours a day on Facebook and/or Twitter. Mums appear more comfortable when this is done at home, perhaps because parents feel it is safer for their children to be online inside the home, where they are easier to monitor.

Where are young women accessing Facebook?

It's likely to be on their laptop or PC (88% of young women own one) – which parents probably find easier to monitor. But it's also on their mobile phones – 69% of young women own a smartphone.

As young women get older, they are more likely to use what they've seen on social networking sites to inform their conversations with others. Almost half (49%) of young women have shared something that they have seen posted on Facebook or Twitter in the last month, peaking at 59% among young adults. This suggests that young women are heavily influenced by what they see on social media, and this influence increases with age.

The truth about airbrushing and advertising

Our research into young women's feelings about idealised imagery focuses on five central themes in the debate about body confidence and airbrushing:

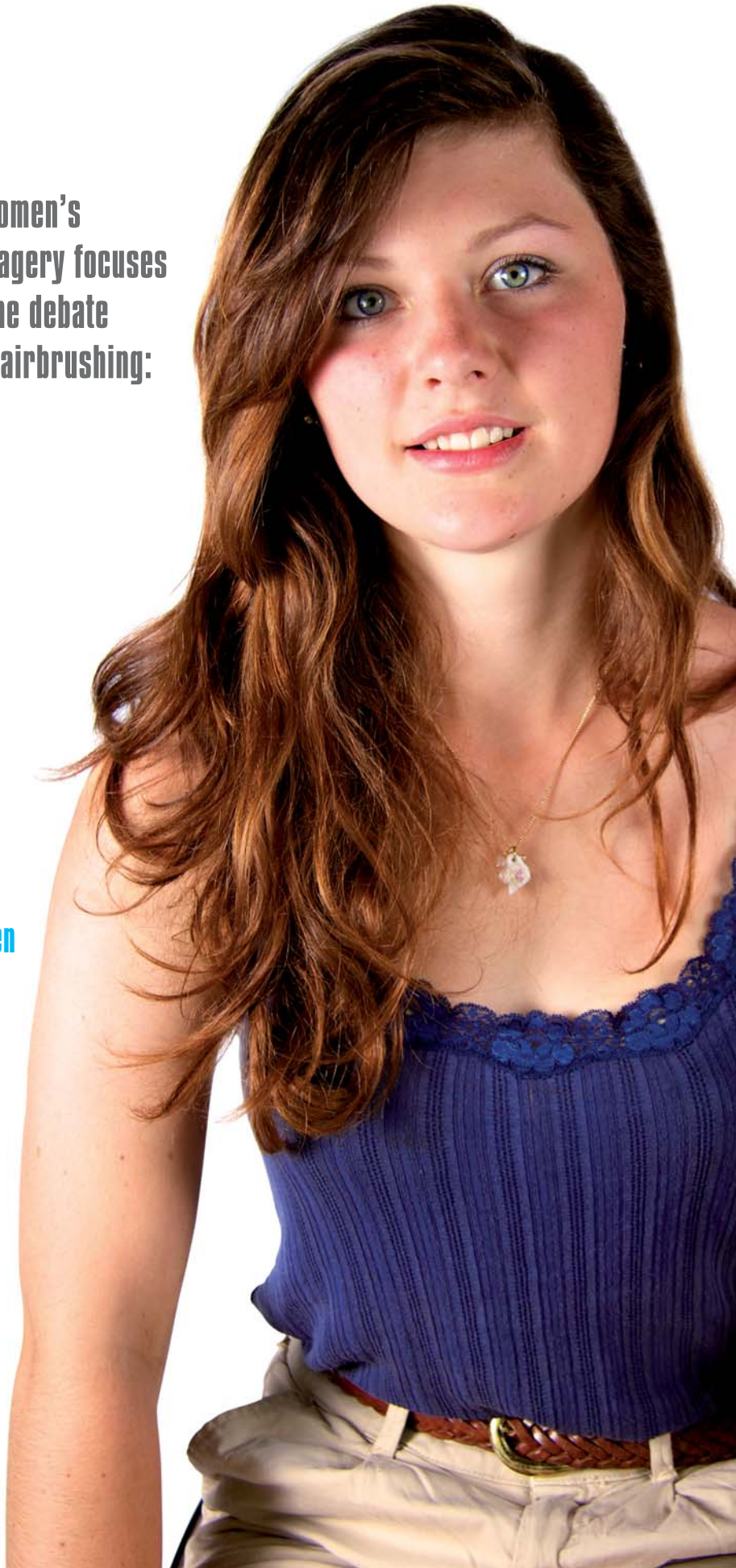
1: We discover whether young women understand the differences between advertising and editorial.

2: We determine whether young women understand the term 'airbrushing'.

3: We examine young women's perceptions of 'flawless' models in adverts.

4: We look at how young women feel about the portrayal of thinness in adverts.

5: We find out what young women want to see in adverts.



Do young women understand the differences between advertising and editorial?

Our research suggests that sometimes it is difficult to distinguish advertising from editorial.

Magazines

Young girls are quick to recognise adverts in magazines, since they believe an advert is something which features a brand name – "if it's got the name of where you can get it from, it's an advert" (Girl, 10). When looking at a magazine interview with a celebrity, in which references to a particular brand are made, early teens recognise this as an advert, because the celebrity "probably doesn't" use that product. But interestingly, older girls appear less certain. When looking at the same article, the young women say "I didn't see it as an advert" (Girl, 17), "I wouldn't say it's an advert, I'd say she's just promoting her product" (Girl, 15), and "It's mainly an article, so you read it as if it's true" (Woman, 18). This is also the case true for their Mums, who debate whether or not they consider this an advert or an article. One Mum says : "You are looking at an article", whereas another says "That is blatantly an advertisement". Another asks "Why is it an advertisement? I don't get it ... it's giving you facts ... she's talking about other things". This suggests that as young women become older, they are more able to see the similarities between certain types of advertising and editorial.

Websites

Adverts on websites also appear difficult to spot. Young women aged 15-18 tell us that adverts on web pages "are always down the side, or on the top". They say that "adverts usually don't have much writing, especially on the internet" (Woman, 18). As such, they find it hard to distinguish between advertorials and editorials online, especially on news websites, because these are considered a "trusted" source.

Ads on Facebook appear easiest to identify. Company pages on Facebook are generally considered adverts – young women believe that brands are simply "trying to get more likes than the other brands, because it makes them look better, makes more people want to buy their products" (Woman, 18).

Do young women understand the term 'airbrushing'?

It has been claimed that young women don't realise that images in adverts have been airbrushed. This has resulted in calls for a 'kite mark' to be placed on photographs which have been digitally enhanced, to alert consumers to the practice. However, our research shows that young women are already well aware of the widespread digital manipulation of everyday images.

Some 84% of young women know what the term 'airbrushing' means. The number is high even among pre-teens: over half (58%) say they understand the term, with awareness rising to 97% amongst 16-21-year-olds.

These high levels of understanding are also reflected in the fact that 40% of young adults have used, or asked someone else to use, airbrushing techniques to make a photo of themselves look more attractive. The focus group discussions suggest that such photos are probably those posted on Facebook. One 14-year-old girl describes how "If you want to put a picture on Facebook, everyone's going to edit it a bit, to make themselves look better".

Moreover, the majority of young women (85%) are aware when looking at magazines or advertising that sometimes the images have been airbrushed.

Again, this figure is high amongst pre-teens, with 63% agreeing that they are aware, rising to 98% amongst young adults.

Their information comes from a variety of sources as outlined below:

TV programmes: 47%

Magazines: 41%

At school/college: 39%

From parent/guardian: 34%

Websites: 26%

These figures vary considerably depending on the age of the respondent, and to a lesser extent by social grade. Younger girls aged 10-15 are more likely to have learnt about airbrushing from a parent or guardian (47%), whereas young adults are more likely to have gathered information from TV programmes (62%) or magazines (55%). Young women are also more likely to have been educated about airbrushing by a parent or guardian if they are from a C1C2 (38%) or DE (35%) background, compared with fewer than a third of AB young women (28%).

This suggests that information about airbrushing is reaching young women mainly via TV programmes, magazines, and school or college. Education at school seems to be a particularly effective way of educating young women about airbrushing. One 13-year-old girl describes how in her ICT class she has been "finding out about all the airbrushing, and you see how they get the computer and they edit it for, like, their legs to be skinnier, cellulite to be removed, their boobs to look bigger".

Which images do young women prefer?

Once we understood what young women thought of idealised images and digital manipulation in advertising, Credos wanted to discover which type of images they prefer in advertising aimed at them. To test their preferences, we showed 1,000 young women four different images of the same model. Credos commissioned its own photo shoot because we were unable to find an un-retouched image of a young healthy-sized model. We chose our model, Bella, because she is at the upper end of the age group we were polling and she is an average UK dress size 10-12. The original image of Bella (image 1) was then manipulated to different degrees:

1: The first image was completely unchanged, so we refer to it here as 'natural'.

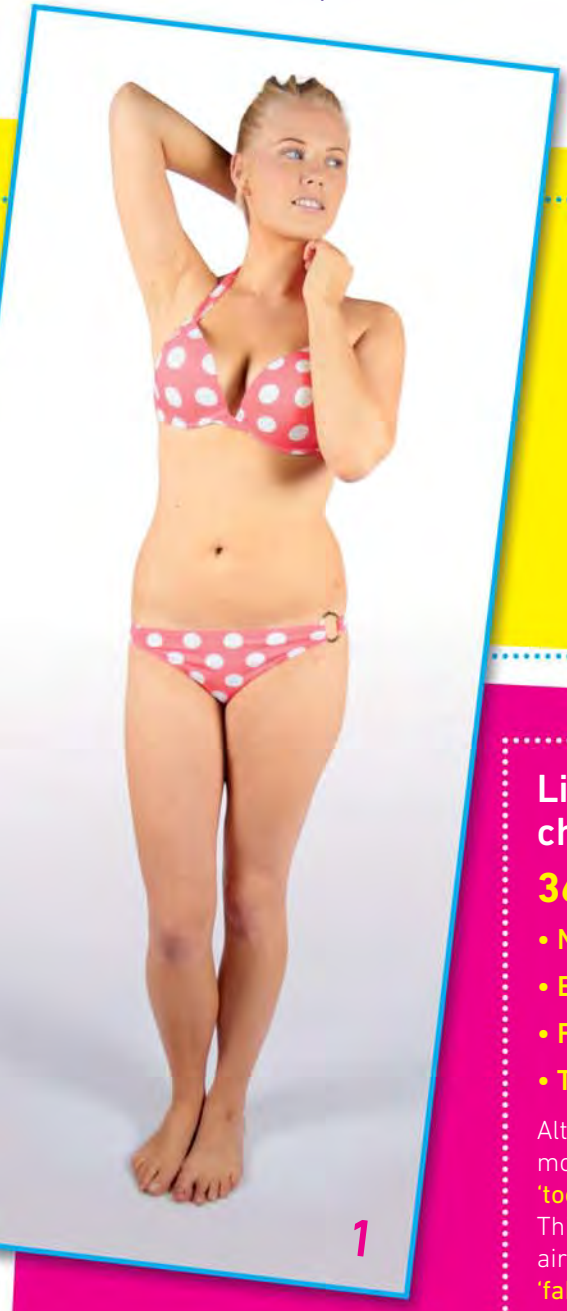
2: The second image was lightly retouched, removing minor blemishes and evening out her skin tone.

3: In the third image, Bella's body shape was altered, slimming her to a UK size 8.

4: In the fourth image she has been made to look extremely thin - we estimate a UK size 4.

Our question: "Which of the following images would you choose to appear in an advert for women, or girls, like you?"

The answer: The majority (76%) of young women prefer either natural (image 1), or lightly retouched (image 2), over the heavily airbrushed images (images 3 and 4), as our survey results demonstrate here.



Natural image

40% choose this

- Natural (78%)
- Beautiful (35%)
- Perfect (17%)

16-21-year-olds are more likely to consider this image 'beautiful' than their younger counterparts. 44% of mid-teens and 40% of young adults choose 'beautiful' to describe this image, compared with just 29% of early teens and 26% of mid-teens.

Light cosmetic changes

36% choose this

- Natural (48%)
- Beautiful (35%)
- Fake (18%)
- Too airbrushed (18%)

- Removing blemishes (mosquito bites, moles, bruises)
- Painting nails
- Smoothing down hair
- Whitening teeth and eyes
- Evening out & brightening skin tone

Although both 'natural' and 'beautiful' are once again the most popular words used to describe this image, 'fake' and 'too airbrushed' are selected by a sizeable number (18%). This suggests that girls are recognising even minor airbrushing techniques in images. Although 'natural' and 'fake' appear to be contradictory terms, this may be explained by the fact that the model was wearing very little make-up, and respondents could therefore be referring to her minimal make-up when they choose 'natural'.

3

Altered body shape

20% choose this

- **Natural (34%)**
- **Too airbrushed (32%)**
- **Fake (30%)**
- Slimmer legs, arms, hips and stomach

As they get older, girls are less likely to consider this image to be 'natural'. Around 40% of 10-15-year-olds describe this image as 'natural', compared with just over a fifth (21%) of mid-teenage girls. This may be because older girls are more likely to understand how images can be digitally manipulated, and therefore are able to cast a more critical eye over the photographs.

2

4

'Ultra-thin'

5% choose this

- **Too thin (78%)**
- **Unnatural (59%)**
- **Too airbrushed (56%)**
- Lengthening body
- Reducing cleavage

This is the least popular image by far. Comparisons between young adults and pre-/early teens reveal the most significant differences of opinion: 69% of early teens describe this image as 'too thin', rising to 85% of young adults; 49% of pre-teens describe it as 'unnatural', climbing to 71% of young adults; and 40% of pre-teens describe it as 'too airbrushed', peaking at 74% of young adults.

Young women's perceptions of 'flawless' models in adverts

Despite the fact that young women are aware of airbrushing in advertising, some continue to aspire to look like the re-touched images they see. Although 42% disagree that seeing airbrushed models in adverts makes them want to look like those models, over a third (37%) of young women say that it does. This proportion is worryingly high among pre-teens: a third (33%) of girls aged 10-12 agree with this statement, but it peaks among mid-teenage girls. Some 45% of 16-17-year-olds agree, falling slightly to 42% once young women reach 18 years of age. This suggests that improved knowledge of airbrushing does not necessarily mitigate the negative impact these images can have on young women's body confidence.

Young women tell us that they respond more positively to natural images. We asked them whether they think it is acceptable for brands or products to use airbrushing to erase blemishes or spots on models in their adverts. Almost a third (30%) of young women believe this is very unacceptable, and a similar number (31%) consider it slightly unacceptable. The figure is highest among those in their early teens: over three quarters (77%) of 13-15-year-olds say this is unacceptable - 34% say it's very unacceptable, while 33% say it's slightly unacceptable.

> "I don't really take much notice of it. I wouldn't sit there and go, 'I've got to go and get that hairspray, I've got to go and get that mascara, 'cause I might end up looking like Cheryl Cole'. Girl, 13"

Young women's attitudes towards thin models in adverts

We also asked our respondents whether they agree with the statement 'seeing adverts using thin models makes me want to diet/lose weight/feel more conscious of the way I look'. While over a third (35%) of young women disagree with this statement, almost half (47%) of young women agree. It varies considerably by age, with mid-teens again the most likely to agree:

Pre-teens: 38% agree

Early teens: 34% agree

Mid-teens: 61% agree

Young adults: 55% agree

There is a significant difference between social grades when it comes to the statement 'seeing adverts using thin models makes me want to diet/lose weight/feel more conscious of the way I look'. Over half (52%) of AB young women agree with this statement, compared with 40% of young women from a DE background. These differences are also reflected in the fact that almost two fifths (39%) of AB young women agree that they 'want to look like airbrushed models in adverts', compared with just under a third (32%) of DE young women.

Opinions are even more pronounced when it comes to airbrushing being used to change the body shape of a model in advertising. A large majority (84%) of young women believe that this is unacceptable, ranging from 78% of pre-teens to 89% of young adults. This shows that the older girls become, the less tolerant they are of this particular use of airbrushing.

What the answers from both these questions suggest is that young women's body confidence is at its lowest when they leave compulsory education. This could be for two main reasons. First, 16 is the age at which young women reach the age of consent, and therefore concerns about their appearance are top of mind. Mums recognise this type of behaviour – one mother of a mid-teen describes how "Getting ready to go out is stressful for her and me – every Friday she starts at about 4pm and goes on for about 5 hours until she goes out".

Second, for those who enter a college or sixth form, it is the age at which many of them no longer have to wear a school uniform, and may therefore become more conscious of the way they look in comparison to their peers. They may also become more aware of their appearance because, rather than compare themselves to others in school uniform, they become part of the adult world – comparing themselves to older women who have more money to spend on fashion, hair and make-up.

> *"I don't really look at things like that and be like, 'Oh, I wish I was that pretty' … I don't really sit there and like, cry and that, and be like, 'Oh my God, why am I like this?' I just sometimes wish that I was that skinny and that tall.*
> Girl, 13"

GIRLS TALK...

How do young women feel about their appearance?

I worry that when I go out I don't look that nice. I want to look nice when I go out
Girl, 10

I used to always be paranoid going out in a pair of shorts, just in case someone would be like 'put your legs away, they're fat'. But that's only 'cause we think we've got to be that skinny otherwise we can't wear certain clothes
Girl, 13

What do they think of airbrushing in adverts?

It doesn't really affect me – not as much as people say it does
Girls, 13-15

It has to be realistic, otherwise you just don't believe it
Woman, 18

It's like they're lying
Girl, 11

It doesn't even look human, it's too much
Girl, 14

How does it affect their impression of the brand or product?

A really pretty girl would make me want to buy the product more
Girl, 17

They are selling us products that don't work
Girl, 10

When they are selling something, like an advert, then they probably airbrush it so it gets more money
Girl, 11

They make everything perfect – you can't tell what they are advertising
Girl, 15

You don't know if they've actually got that [product] on
Woman, 18

How does it make young women feel?

It makes me feel a bit insecure
Girl, 15

If airbrushing was never invented, there would be so much less problems. Anorexia would be so much less of an issue
Girl, 17

All the models, they're always tall and skinny ... if we didn't have the magazines and advertising then we wouldn't know any different
Girl, 13

What should advertisers do?

They should make it more realistic, because it's all fake
Girl, 14

They should not always use skinny models, 'cause not always skinny people are buying stuff
Girl, 14

Plus-size models look just as nice
Girl, 15

I think you should have a range [of sizes] because that's real
Woman, 18

Low body confidence

I don't think it's got anything to do with magazines. I think it's to do with what people say
Girl, 13

What does all this mean

Our findings show that younger girls are most critical of the use of airbrushing to erase spots or blemishes, possibly because they are more likely to suffer from skin problems at this age. Older girls, on the other hand, are most critical of the use of airbrushing to significantly alter the body shape of a model, possibly because they are more likely to have low body confidence. This shows that the use of airbrushing has a different impact on young women depending on their age, but that in general young women favour more natural images in adverts. The implications of this for brands are far-reaching. Almost half (48%) of young women agree that if brands use airbrushing to significantly alter the way a model looks, it makes them less inclined to believe what the brand or product is telling them. This suggests that young women are more trusting of brands which do not use airbrushing techniques excessively.

MUMS' CONCERNS

After speaking to the young women in our focus groups, we also spoke to their Mums separately, producing some valuable insights into young women's lives.

Growing up too fast?

"Mums tell us that their girls are growing up faster these days and are more mature than they were at the same age. One Mum notes that **"a picture of me aged 16 would be so different compared to girls of 16 now. They are so much more mature – they wear more make-up and what I call fake things: tan, nails, hair, etc., things I can't stand"** (Mum of mid-teen).

They also express concern over the importance some of their girls place on brands and fashion. **"My daughter went to Lakeside the other day and bought a bag and jacket for over £100 – she carries it all around"** (Mum of pre-teen).

Despite noting the differences, Mums don't appear to want to revert to the way things were when they were young. They do all they can to allow their girls the freedom to enjoy their lives, while keeping them safe from any potential downsides presented by today's world."

Body Image

"The Mum of a pre-teenage girl speaks for many when she says **"Yes, it's a big one. Her hair, clothes, weight"**. However, we also observed that their girls' preoccupation with the way they look is not always something that is spoken out loud. As one pre-teen's Mum says, **"They don't make it known – but you see them in the mirror and her mood changes if she doesn't feel good in what she wears. She worries about what people think, a lot"**. Another says **"It's definitely a worry. My daughter put on weight, I could see that, and she talks about her body all the time – I think it's an obsession with her..."** (Mum of mid-teen).

The girls' unspoken concerns tend to manifest themselves as "tantrums" and self-critical behaviour. Mums list complaints such as **"I can't wear this. This looks wrong. My arms are too fat. Now my legs are too short. Have I got muffin tops? My hair won't backcomb properly"** (Mum of early teen). The girls appear to worry a good deal about appearance – particularly their hair, but also spots and blemishes – usually for boys' benefit."

What's the biggest influence?

Mums are very aware of pressures on their girls' lives and the influence of friends is mentioned most often for all age groups. The girls say things like **"my friends have these clothes, why can't I have those?"** (Mum of early teen).

We asked what has the most influence on girls' self-image: friends, advertisements or magazines? The Mums are quite clear that friends are the most important, although a long list of celebrities is cited as also influencing their daughters.

For the youngest girls the Disney channel, Hannah Montana, Tracy Beaker, Teen Mom 2, Cheryl Cole, Rihanna, JLS and Jessie J are all referenced.

Whether the celebrities are a positive or negative influence depends on their image. Mums tend to prefer the younger role models who are **"bubbly and active"** rather than the older celebrities who are experiencing difficulties and appear to be living miserable lives (Mum of pre-teen).

> **Despite noting the differences, Mums don't appear to want to revert to the way things were when they were young.**

GROWING UP, INCREASING PRESSURE

Interestingly, Mums seem divided on the growing pressures that come with increasing age.

Despite the challenges facing girls in their early teens, some Mums fear that the greatest pressures come when they are around 18 years old. They expect that boys are more critical of girls at this age, and this additional pressure may influence vulnerable girls to develop eating disorders (Mums of early teens).

However, Mums of mid-teens appear less worried, and say that the age gap of two years makes a big difference. According to them, **"getting a job really improves the girls' view of themselves"** (Mums of mid-teens).

This suggests the reality of being older is less scary than it might appear – it also highlights the importance of a purpose and sense of achievement in the girls' lives.

What do Mums think about advertising?

We spent some time discussing advertising with the girls' Mums, and we showed them a number of videos and stills of cosmetic and beauty adverts.

Mums like glamour and attractive models, and they admit that they would be less likely to buy products advertised by less attractive people. They recognise that their girls feel this way too. However, they are keen to see more diversity in advertising, particularly when it comes to body size and shape.

They frequently raise a number of complaints about some forms of advertising, such as where images have been generated using lash inserts or hair extensions. Notably, such complaints arise spontaneously without any prompting from the moderator. They also claim that these adverts are more likely to **"fool"** their daughters:

"Mascara ads are annoying, they are clearly false - and how can they get away with it?".

"Mascara ones - I think the girls would really crave the long lashes, they are really into that".

"I think the girls think that is achievable".

(All Mums of early teens)

However, Mums do tend to underestimate their girls' ability to interpret these types of advertisements. The girls we spoke to are no more likely than their Mums to believe the ads – they still find them irritating and question their credibility.

"Do they try to look like the girls in these mags? No, but I do think they try to mimic in their Facebook photos – they do get gorgeous pictures – that's what worries me a lot" (Mums of early teens).

What would Mums change?

A large proportion of Mums seem broadly happy with things as they are, but they would prefer some more diversity and realism in advertising. This quote summarises a typical response:

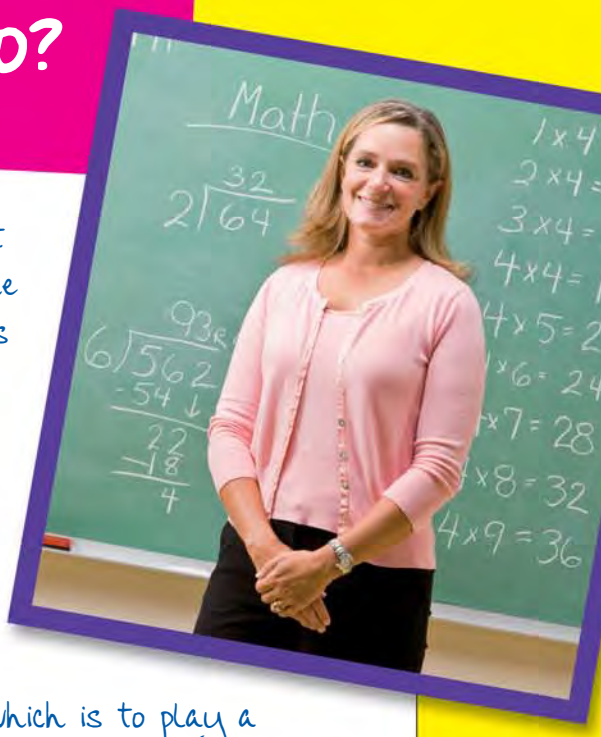
"Just tone it down a bit ... it's good to advertise ... but have more realistic images"

(Mums of 13-15-year-olds).

Final thought

"The girls know a hell of a lot more about all this stuff than we thought they did!" (Mums of early teens).

What can schools do?



Comments

Throughout the course of our study, we observed that girls' self-esteem and body confidence is often low. The girls' vulnerability seems to peak at around 16-17 years of age, just as external pressures such as making choices for the future are increasing. Therefore, involving girls in discussions about airbrushing and body confidence, prior to the most vulnerable ages in their lives, would help. Around age 10 would be an appropriate time to begin, just before most girls enter secondary school. The teaching materials developed by not-for-profit organisation Media Smart, which is to play a key role in supporting the Government's ongoing Body Confidence campaign, will be of benefit.

We note from our discussions with Mums that girls' concerns about their appearance often go unspoken, but that their discomfort is manifested in self-critical behaviour which further undermines their confidence. Therefore, it is important that girls are encouraged to question their self-perception, in order to minimise its impact on their future well-being.

Recommendations

Credos advocates the Succeed Body Image Programme and its 'cognitive dissonance intervention' workshops.[1] In these, groups of women are encouraged to voice positive statements about their body image, while questioning received wisdom about ideal body types. Teachers can be trained to run such groups in schools, as can students in universities. The project is considered highly effective in improving self-esteem and reducing attendant problems among the more vulnerable, such as eating disorders.

Research shows that almost two thirds of teachers (64%) think that pupils are not confident about their bodies when they first arrive at secondary school.[2]

1 Becker, C. B., & Stice, E. (2011). Succeed Body Image Programme Manual. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
2 National Schools Partnership (June 2011). Body Image Survey.

Is your company ready to face the truth about advertising?

Credos' work is supported by a group of advertisers, agencies and media owners.

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Together they are helping to preserve the industry's reputation and improve its standing.

If your company is ready to join them, call Tim Lefroy, CEO at the Advertising Association on 0207 340 1100 or email Tim.Lefroy@adassoc.org.uk.

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