

# CTPA, Body Image and Self-esteem

CTPA is the authoritative public voice of a vibrant and responsible UK cosmetics industry. In this special paper we are publishing the views of six key people, each of whom has a particular interest in the subject of body image and self-esteem.

The contributors are:

- Lynne Featherstone MP, Minister for Equalities
- Lucy Beresford, Writer and Psychotherapist
- Jo Swinson MP
- Richard Darlington, Head of News, Institute for Public Policy Research
- Karen Fraser, Credos Director
- Guy Parker, Chief Executive, Advertising Standards Authority

These contributions were first published in the CTPA members' only newsletter in November 2011 and are now being issued more widely in their original, un-edited form. In this way, CTPA is bringing together a variety of views to help a wider audience understand some of the factors involved in a complex debate. We hope you find them informative.



Dr Chris Flower  
Director-General

# Body Image & Self-Esteem

In this special section of the CTPA members' newsletter six external commentators have been invited to present their own views on a topic that is of key importance to our sector and that has received attention from David Cameron, our Prime Minister - body image and self-esteem, particularly relating to young girls. Through the Equalities Minister, Lynne Featherstone MP, the Government has established a national body confidence campaign which "aims to reduce the burdens that popular culture places on an individual's wellbeing and self-esteem." Given that CTPA's own independent, commissioned research from 2004 ('The Self-Esteem Society' by Demos and 'Me, Myself and Work' by The Work Foundation) demonstrated both the importance of positive self-esteem and also the key role that confidence in one's appearance plays in enhancing self-esteem, you might expect there to be a synergy between such campaigns for body confidence and the cosmetics industry that could be exploited. However, not everyone sees it that way.

On the contrary, what some see as aspirational images to be enjoyed, others see as establishing unachievable ideals that lead to disillusionment and feelings of inadequacy in those who feel, rightly or wrongly, that they cannot live up to their expectations.

No one disagrees that low self-esteem is a bad thing; the consequences for the individual, their circle of family, friends and associates and for society as a whole can be damaging. But the causes of low self-esteem are complex and far-reaching, certainly involving more than pictures of beauty depicted in cosmetics advertisements. Yet, there is a risk that in seeking solutions, we jump to conclusions without first gathering the evidence. As the American journalist Henry Louis Menken famously said

***"For every complex problem, there is a solution that is simple, neat, and wrong."***

We must seek to understand the problem, dissect apart its various components and see whether there are actions the cosmetics industry can take to ensure it is part of an appropriate solution.

What follows are the views from a member of government, a member of parliament, a journalist, a psychologist, a representative of advertisers and a representative of an advertising regulatory authority. I hope you enjoy reading their contributions and that they stimulate your own thinking on how we can better understand this situation. Because, without knowing what the underlying problems really are, any corrective measures taken are likely to prove ineffective at best and might even be counter-productive.

This topic is most important not just because of the impact low self-esteem may have on individuals within our society but because our industry sees enhancement of self-esteem as a key positive benefit cosmetics bring to society. Not to get this right is not an option.

## Lynne Featherstone, Minister for Equalities

Instilling self-confidence in our children and young adults as they prepare for their lives ahead, is usually high on the wish-list for anyone involved in influencing our future generation. Parents and carers want their young to walk out into the world with strong self-esteem – so that they can lead healthy, happy lives and play their full role as citizens – contributing to a dynamic and diverse society.

### *Of course there are many factors that influence a person's self-esteem.*

As you in the beauty industry know, having confidence in your looks and body (whatever your age or gender) is one of them. How a person feels about their body shape can influence their wellbeing and have a good or bad impact on different aspects of their lives.

It's therefore concerning that the numbers of women and girls who feel bad about the way they look is reaching epidemic proportions.

Girlguiding UK report that 47% of young women believe that the pressure to look attractive is the worst part of being female.

Recent polling for the Bailey Review on the early sexualisation of children, shows that parents felt their children's lack of body confidence was a real cause for concern. And, when half of young women are open to the idea of using cosmetic surgery and girls as young as 11 do not feel comfortable leaving the house without makeup, we know we need to act.

It's not an issue only affecting girls and young women either. In a survey conducted by YMCA, one in ten boys say they would start taking steroids to build muscle if they were unhappy with the way they looked.

That's why I'm working with health professionals, fashion, the beauty industry, the media, the advertising industry and the voluntary sector in the first Government expert advisory group and national Campaign for Body Confidence. As we are surrounded in our daily lives by millions of images of often unattainable levels of perfection, our aim is to encourage more open and public conversation about what we know is a growing problem. We want to widen the definition of beauty to include all ages, shapes, sizes and ethnicities, and we want to help people recognise their value beyond just their physical appearance.

Tremendous work within the beauty and fashion industries is already underway. One major company's ground-breaking campaign for real beauty broke the mould in bringing diversity to beauty advertising for their brand with great success. Gok Wan and C4 has done much to bring the body confidence debate into the mainstream. Another major cosmetics brand has launched an airbrush-free advertising campaign. And Caryn Franklin and Erin O'Connor's All Walks Beyond the Catwalk, which celebrates diversity in fashion, embracing the full range of sizes, was a welcome innovation last year.

In Government we are also working with teachers to empower children to develop resilience to media images of air-brushed perfection – by developing fun media literacy lessons which will encourage greater understanding of picture manipulation and free discussion of body confidence within the curriculum.

We know that this issue is cultural – and that it isn't any one group or industry that is undermining people's confidence in their bodies. It's too much part of the fabric of our society for quick heavy-handed solutions. A miracle piece of legislation or regulation of airbrushing for example will not bring about lasting cultural change.

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/body-confidence>

## Lucy Beresford, Writer & Psycho- therapist

Buying, applying and wearing make-up enhances the way we feel about ourselves. We are imitative creatures and little girls first learn about make-up from copying their mother. The desire to make ourselves beautiful is thousands of years old, and is common across all civilisations and cultures. And that's because there's a huge evolutionary drive towards making the most of what we've got physically as a means of survival.

Unsurprisingly, our increased interest in make-up and cosmetics occurs around the time of puberty, when we are becoming sexually developed. This period has always been stressful—what we're all trying to work out is: who am I? And so experimenting with make-up has long been a healthy rite of passage for teenagers as they become more aware of their appearance, their relationships, their body and who they are.

*Beyond the survival instinct, using make-up helps us bond with others and feel more confident about the self we show to the world.*

As well as the fun aspects of make-up, using cosmetics can help many who are enduring stressful times. The self-esteem of cancer patients has been shown to be enormously enhanced from the skincare and make-up advice available from such charities as Look Good...Feel Better, and adolescents can cover up the effects of hormonal changes visible on the skin.

As for adults, in this time of global financial chaos, redundancy fears and general insecurity, it is worth remembering that although stress is a normal, healthy response to life, it often plays havoc with our skin, which can badly affect self-esteem. Whether it's spots, eczema, bags under the eyes or dryness due to poor diet, make-up and good skin-care can assist us in feeling more in control of our stressful lives.

Some say that the magazine, fashion and beauty industries are being irresponsible in promoting ideals which impressionable people, especially teenagers, might

find it hard to live up to, giving rise to eating or body dysmorphic disorders or poor self-esteem. My view is that while augmented images might limit our vision of what is attractive, the aetiology of such medical conditions is a lot more complex than simply being about exposure to air-brushing. I believe parents and schools have a vital role to play from early on, in educating children and adolescents about normal expectations of beauty and self-esteem.

What we see over time is that beautifying ourselves makes us feel confident & powerful. Make-up helps us experiment with who we are, and provides opportunities to lift our mood—legally and inexpensively—or to feel more in control when we are stressed.

As a psychotherapist I regard beauty rituals as part of healthy, important self-nurture, which is essential for our ongoing well-being. Let's not forget that one clue to a decline in mental health is poor self-care. At the very least, playing with make-up is fun. And doing fun things is essential, today more than ever, for our quality of life.

<http://lucyberesford.co.uk/>

## Jo Swinson MP

*The multi-billion pound beauty, toiletries and cosmetics industry markets products with a promise that they will make us feel good about ourselves.*

Yet the images of 'perfect' bodies used to advertise these goods are having the opposite effect: 1 in 4<sup>1</sup> Brits say they feel depressed about their bodies, and a recent survey found that a majority of women<sup>2</sup> said beauty industry advertising campaigns were having a negative impact on their lives.

In today's cosmetics industry, beauty is increasingly being equated with flawless perfection, as men and women strive for the 'ideal' body they see in magazines. These narrow ideals are being sculpted through media images of impossibly beautiful people, with no diversity of body sizes and shapes.

It is time for the beauty industry to reflect on its practices. Modern technology has allowed people's bodies to be digitally manipulated to an unprecedented degree.

From the removal of spot or blemish to complete changes in body shapes like slimming of waists and enlargement of breasts and muscles, digital manipulation is now commonplace.

These depictions encourage unhealthy aspirations to body shapes that are simply impossible to achieve and set a worrying example to children and young people, with over half of 14-16 year olds citing media influence as the main reason for dieting<sup>3</sup>. More extreme measures are widely-sought, perhaps a suggestion that beauty products just won't do the job anymore: breast augmentation procedures went up again by 10% in the last year<sup>4</sup>.

Some companies have been challenging the perception that an authentic representation of women's bodies would not sell products by introducing women of all sizes, ages and backgrounds into their advertising campaigns<sup>5</sup>.

The success of these ventures indicates the beauty industry's potential to embrace a wider and more inclusive definition of beauty, but almost all cosmetic advertisements continue to portray an exceptional narrow and uniform beauty ideal.

There is growing pressure on the beauty industry to change, and in a recent step forward the Advertising Standards Authority produced a help note to clarify its codes surrounding pre- and post-production techniques.

However, 77% of adults think that retouched adverts should carry a health warning<sup>6</sup>, and Central YMCA and the Centre for Appearance Research are currently conducting a study into the impact of labelling retouched images on children and adults. Going forward, this movement must work together with the beauty, fashion, and advertising media industry to promote a better-informed and more responsible code of practice.

I'd welcome your response to these ideas, and we will be convening a roundtable with industry experts to discuss responsible retouching. If you'd like to share your thoughts and feed in to the debate please e-mail:  
[info@campaignforbodyconfidence.org.uk](mailto:info@campaignforbodyconfidence.org.uk)

<sup>1</sup> Central YMCA research - <http://www.ymca.co.uk/body-confidence/>

<sup>2</sup> Dove research, 2009 – Survey of 1000 women

<sup>3</sup> Girlguiding UK – Girls' Attitudes survey 2010 - [http://girlsattitudes.girlguiding.org.uk/results\\_by\\_age/11\\_-\\_16\\_years/health.aspx](http://girlsattitudes.girlguiding.org.uk/results_by_age/11_-_16_years/health.aspx)

<sup>4</sup> British Association of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons - audit figures: <http://www.baaps.org.uk/about-us/press-releases/855-moobs-and-boobs-double-ddigit-rise>

<sup>5</sup> "96-year-old stars in beauty ad", the Guardian 04/01/05 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2005/jan/04/advertising.uknews>

<sup>6</sup> YMCA research 2011 - <http://www.ymca.co.uk/bodyconfidence/media/airbrushing>

## Richard Darlington, Head of News, IPPR

Equalities Minister Lynne Featherstone recently claimed that *“the constant pressure to look impossibly perfect, be like skinny celebrities and conform to imposed stereotypes is creating a rising tide of low self-esteem, depression and anxiety among young girls”*. Is she right? And could cosmetics advertisers help solve the problem by labelling the images that they digitally alter? Above all, are airbrushed images the most significant influences on girl’s self-esteem?

There is certainly strong evidence that girls in the UK suffer from low self-esteem, depression and anxiety. But polling by GirlGuiding UK shows that these issues develop as girls get older. More than half of 7–8 year-olds (54%) say they are ‘very happy’ most of the time. But just one in five (21%) 16–18 year-olds and less than one in five 19–21 year-olds say they are ‘very happy’ most of the time. The same poll shows that unhappiness also grows with age. Broadly speaking, twice as many girls suffer low self-esteem, depression and anxiety than boys.

Almost half (47%) of girls aged 7–21 says that ‘pressure to look attractive’ is a disadvantage of being a girl. But slightly more (52%) feel that ‘girls are expected to cook and clean’ is a worse disadvantage and the worst disadvantage is ‘periods, body changes, pains of being pregnant and giving birth’ (67%).

Listening to the opinions expressed by girls of different ages also casts doubt on the significance of the pressure to look attractive. Seven and eight year old girls say that their view that ‘girls have less chance to play sports and games than boys do’ is a more significant disadvantage of being a girl. Slightly older girls (aged 9–10) rate the ‘pressure to look attractive’ as the fifth worst disadvantage of being a girl. It is older teenage girls (16–18 year-olds) that feel the ‘pressure to look attractive’ most acutely, with 76% picking it as a disadvantage of being a girl, but even among this age group it is not the top answer and the concern declines in the next age group (rated by 69% of 19–21 year-olds).

When asked what ‘qualities make someone a good role model’ just one in four (26 per cent) of girls aged 7–21 year olds picked ‘attractive’. This was the ninth most popular answer (only ‘young’, ‘famous’, ‘married’ and ‘rich’ scored lower). The top answer was ‘helps others’ (61%), which actually scored highest among older age groups (16–19 and 19–21 year-olds). Other highly scoring qualities were ‘brave/courageous’ (59%) and ‘clever’ (58%).

When asked what helps girls ‘be successful in life’, less than a third (29%) of 7–21 year-old girls picked ‘being attractive’. This was only the ninth most popular answer.

So if the self-esteem of girls, teenagers and young women is affected by ‘the constant pressure to look impossibly perfect [and] be like skinny celebrities’, they do not seem aware of it, or they are not willing to admit to it. They do, however, seem to object to ‘imposed stereotypes’ but these relate to ‘cooking and cleaning’ and ‘the chance to play sports’, rather than ‘being attractive’.

But would girls’ self-esteem improve if images that had been digitally altered by cosmetics advertisers were labelled? In truth, no one can be sure.

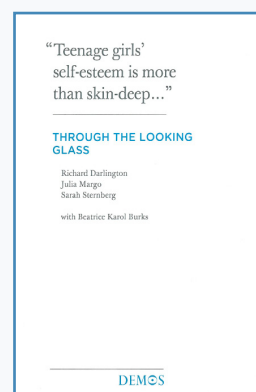
***There is no evidence that the labelling of images would improve the self-esteem of teenage girls because there are no credible studies that have tested the proposition that labelled images have a less negative effect.***

More significant are the modern practicalities of regulating advertising and protecting children from inappropriate images. In an age where seven out of ten 5-16 year-olds own a mobile phone, almost half of 12-15 year-olds own their own internet enabled smartphone and a third of 9–16 year-olds say they regularly access the web on a mobile device, the old tools for shielding children from inappropriate content are increasingly redundant.

Today’s children, especially older teenage girls, do not ‘surf the web’ in the way that their parents did. Instead, recent polling by YouGov and the most recent study by OfCom, show that their primary use of the internet is for social networking. Fully 95 per cent of 16 year old girls have Facebook profiles. The sharing of images that have already been banned by the Advertising Standards Authority is going to be harder and harder to prevent.

In this context, parents and policy-makers need to build the resilience and self-esteem of girls who can no longer be prevented from exposure to inappropriate content and for whom digital manipulation is taken as read. Rather than simply labelling the altered imaging in their advertising, the cosmetics industry should play its part by using its influence to challenge ‘cooking and cleaning’ stereotypes and by promoting and funding better sporting opportunities for girls.

The problem of teenage girls’ self-esteem is more complex than some would have you believe. Simply put, teenage girls’ self-esteem is more than skin deep. It will take more than a label in the corner of a digitally altered advert to significantly improve it.



<http://www.ymca.co.uk/bodyconfidence/media/airbrushing>  
<http://www.ippr.org/about-us>



## Karen Fraser, Credos Director

The banning of some beauty adverts over the summer, following complaints about their use of digital manipulation, has brought the issue of advertising and body confidence into the headlines once again. Many of the calls from Westminster, NGOs and the media for changes to the way models are represented in adverts have focused on the potentially damaging impact of idealised imagery on the body confidence of young women. Current campaigns by major cosmetics companies promoting the use of un-retouched images have shown that advertisers too are entering into the debate.

But while the commentators and opinion-formers have managed to make their views heard, the voice of the consumer has remained muted. Until now.

As part of our Pretty as a Picture project on airbrushing and body confidence, advertising's think tank Credos has asked young women what they think about these issues, and what they want to see from the advertising industry.

**After all, as any advertiser will tell you, it's the consumer's opinion which really counts.**

For this reason, we have determined the impact on young women of airbrushing in advertising, in order to establish the extent of the problem with body confidence. In doing so, we've measured young women's ability to distinguish advertisements from content, and seen whether it affects how they react to advertising. We have also explored practical solutions to the issues that arose.

Credos has carried out qualitative research in the form of interviews with friendship groups of young women aged 10-18 from a range of ethnic and social backgrounds and, separately, their mums. From our research, it's evident that young women have a strong awareness of what 'airbrushing' means and that it is sometimes used in advertising.

We found that education about airbrushing (at school, from parents, or from a television show) helps girls interpret and decode images they see in advertisements.

But we also found that girls place a lot of importance on their own and others' appearance: even those as young as 10 seem heavily influenced by celebrity culture, and are careful to ensure that only 'ideal' images of themselves are posted on online networking sites. They also told us that they want to see more diversity in advertising and the media.

To explore these findings further, we launched a survey of 1000 young women aged 10-21, asking them about their media lives; what worries them and what makes them happy; and whether they understand what airbrushing is. At the heart of the questionnaire is a particularly interesting technique where we asked the respondents to select which of four images (all of the same model, Bella, and each airbrushed to varying degrees) they would use to promote a product to someone like them:



Natural Image

Cosmetic Airbrushing

Slimmer

Ultra Thin

For the purposes of our questionnaire, we've airbrushed Bella's original image in the following ways: first, removing blemishes (she had a couple of mosquito bites from her holiday), painting her nails, smoothing down her hair, whitening her teeth and eyes; second, slimming her legs, arms, hips and stomach; and finally, reducing her cleavage and stretching her body. Our questionnaire asks the young women to choose words to describe each of these images, in order to determine where they believe the limits of acceptability lie when it comes to airbrushing.

What we've found is that young women prefer the more natural images to those which are heavily airbrushed. 76% of young women would choose the natural image or the slightly airbrushed image to appear in an advert for a product aimed at people like them.

Credos has combined the findings from the qualitative and quantitative research into one magazine – Pretty as a Picture – launched in October 2011.

What's clear is that airbrushing and body image are big issues for the consumer, too. In Credos Forum focus groups over the last six months, these topics come up spontaneously in discussion time and time again. We hope that our Pretty as a Picture research provides the advertising industry with the true voice of the consumer, in order to ensure that they continue to advertise responsibly.

If you'd like to hear more about Pretty as a Picture, I'd be delighted to discuss it further.

Please feel free to get in touch by e-mailing [karen.fraser@credos.org.uk](mailto:karen.fraser@credos.org.uk).

Credos is advertising's independently-governed think tank. It was launched by the Advertising Association in 2010. Credos' mission is to 'understand advertising': its role, how it works, how it is perceived, and its value to UK society and the economy.

Credos is funded by the advertising industry, but overseen by an advisory board which assures the quality, objectivity and transparency of its work.

<http://www.credos.org.uk>



## Guy Parker, ASA

***“I know I won’t look like that, but I want to know Julia Roberts can”***

So said an ASA Council member during a recent Council discussion about airbrushing. It summed it up well. Cosmetic advertising is, of course, about aspiration. Ads invariably feature beautiful men and women and there’s nothing wrong with that per se. But where do you draw the line?

We don’t believe women see Cheryl Cole in a hair product ad and automatically think they’ll look like her if they just use the product. Nor is the public blind to the fact that advertisers present their products in the best possible light. Often literally. We know they use professional stylists. And we know they use the world’s best photographers.

But despite all that, there’s a line to be drawn. And we’ve increasingly found ourselves drawing it, arbitrating on whether cosmetics ads that use pre- and post-production techniques are misleading.

This isn’t all down to the campaigning Liberal Democrat MP, Jo Swinson. The issue of unrealistic depictions of beauty cropped up spontaneously in research we undertook among parents, guardians, children and teachers in Cardiff at the turn of the year.

## Dr Chris Flower, CTPA

I would like to thank our contributors to this special edition of the CTPA newsletter. From these six views you can already get a feel for the breadth of opinion that exists as well as a flavour of the complexity of the issue.

This is society’s debate: it is not owned by the cosmetics industry. But we do have an interest in the outcome and expertise that can contribute to understanding. However, our role here is not to argue the facts and data but to respond to the concern society is expressing that something is amiss. To many, perception is reality and that, I believe, drives how the cosmetics industry must engage in this debate. Regarding facts and data, there are many to choose from: the Girl Guides Survey 2010, the Pretty as a Picture research, Through the Looking Glass and even the record of complaints from the ASA. Mining these data sets will provide plenty of figures to support any position

Nor is it just about misleading images: the potential negative impact these ads might have on body confidence, an issue relating to social responsibility, is rising up the public agenda.

So where do we stand? On the face of it, our position is simple: cosmetic ads must not mislead by exaggerating the capability or performance of a product. Recent high profile ASA rulings have set a clear benchmark of what is acceptable. And CAP and BCAP, the industry committees that write the Advertising Codes, recently published guidance, which among other things said that removing or reducing the appearance of lines and wrinkles around the eyes for an eye cream advertisement, or increasing the length or thickness of eyelashes in an advertisement for mascara, were unacceptable. The CTPA and its members played a key role in shaping that advice.

Ads that promote an unhealthy body image are captured by the social responsibility rules that underpin the Advertising Codes, but it’s a question of degree. Airbrush a model’s waist so it looks narrower than her head and you’re in trouble. But what about much less extreme airbrushing? While we’re fully aware of the concerns expressed about the purported harmful effects of airbrushed ads on body image, we’re currently not persuaded that the evidence justifies the introduction of further restrictions against airbrushing, beyond those necessary to prevent misleading advertising.

but arguments developed on that basis will not help us understand what the underlying issues really are and how they can be addressed effectively by all stakeholders. We know there are many dimensions and, although linked, need to be isolated and assessed individually. Many have been mentioned by our contributors but not everyone is aware of what the cosmetics industry has been doing already.

First, we are not talking about the efficacy of cosmetic products: the issue of advertising claims is not part of this debate. However, there had been questions about the use of pre- and post-production digital techniques to alter images and whether such ‘airbrushing’ is inherently misleading. CTPA had engaged with CAP to develop a helpline which explains what is and what is not acceptable from the point of view of misleadingness.

Education is key. If advertising is to remain vibrant and entertaining as well as informative, children must be helped from an early age to understand the world of

I realise that advertisers who have been subject to an adverse ASA ruling may feel singled out, particularly given the high profile media attention and subsequent damage to brand reputation. But we can make no apology for taking a tough line. If an advertiser gets it wrong, we won’t hesitate to take action.

We do, however, want an environment in which responsible advertising can flourish. We’re providing training to the sector and encouraging marketers to take advantage of the wealth of resources and advice available through CAP. Of course this is an ongoing process, and occasionally an ad will fall foul of the rules, but I think we’re seeing the sector adjust its approach.

There’s nothing wrong with cosmetics ads sprinkling a bit of stardust into the public’s lives. But when even the world’s beauties can’t look that beautiful, you’ve laid it on a bit too thick.

### **CopyAdvice** ([www.cap.org.uk](http://www.cap.org.uk))

Get non-broadcast ads right first time and avoid unwanted ASA scrutiny – make Copy Advice an early essential step in your creative process. Our online and bespoke services can help identify any contentious issues before you spend time and resources developing them. Copy Advice is a fast, free, and confidential service for advertisers, agencies and media owners who want to check how their prospective non-broadcast ads or marketing communication concepts measure up against the UK Code of Non-Broadcast Advertising, Sales Promotion and Direct Marketing (CAP Code).

advertising and promotion that surrounds them. Media Smart is a well-respected and credible medium for providing teachers with the necessary materials to tackle this topic in class. CTPA provided seed-funding and technical expertise to help Media Smart develop its latest module “Body Image - An introduction to advertising and body image” which was launched in October.

But there is still work to be done and Lynne Featherstone MP has established an expert group to help the Campaign for Body Confidence. CTPA, though a Board member with excellent knowledge in this area, is participating in that expert group.

The objective of all of these work threads is to reassure society at large that

***the cosmetics industry is listening and will act in a responsible way***

to play its part in a greater solution to those concerns society, and therefore our customers, has.