- **News** **Web**

More
Log in

HUFFPOST WOMEN

Search News and Topics

Like
351K

This is the print preview: Back to normal view »

Elizabeth Perle

Professional word jedi. Recreational nerd.

GET UPDATES FROM Elizabeth Perle

Like
15

Photoshop Isn't Evil. There, I Said It.

Posted: 06/30/11 05:06 PM ET
Follow
>
Jessica Simpson , Tina Fey , Eating Disorders , American Medical Association , Ama , Bossypants , Glee , Gq Magazine , Photoshop , Women News

Last week, the American Medical Association officially denounced Photoshop (and other image manipulation programs), stating that its use is bad for your health.

They explain: "Such alterations can contribute to unrealistic expectations of appropriate body image -- especially among impressionable children and adolescents, according to a decision announced this week. The AMA has adopted a new policy that encourages ad agencies to work with agencies devoted to child and adolescent health to develop guidelines for ads."

I'm certainly not part of the pro-Photoshop camp when it comes to mainstream media (and other platforms that distribute these highly-altered images on a large scale), so I was surprised that my knee-jerk reaction to hearing this news was a long, exaggerated eye roll.

Then I heard Tina Fey's voice in my head, repeating one of my favorite segments from *Bossypants*: "Photoshop itself is not evil. Just like Italian salad dressing is not inherently evil, until you rub it all over a desperate young actress and stick her on the cover of Maxim, pretending to pull her panties down."

I'm not even going to try to assign real-life meaning to that metaphor, but Fey's general sentiment explains my feelings about the AMA news: Photoshop isn't the issue, folks.

The fact that we are coming around now to finally put pressure on our glossies (and other companies in media, advertising, and beyond) to change the way they operate is far too little, far too late. This may seem obvious to say, but magazines aren't using these images because they just don't understand or care that Photoshopping promotes unrealistic and highly problematic representations of beauty. They get it. Trust me.

Magazine covers tend to get the most critical attention when it comes to airbrushing, yet little seems to be changing (the handful of cases where brands turn "Photoshop-free!" into a marketing campaign, aside). Major mags are not drowning as quickly as the "print is dead" advocates have predicted, and many titles are continuing to stay afloat through (among other strategies) relaxing the lines between church and state -- a.k.a., ads and articles -- and doing whatever it takes to get their newsstand sales up. It is not surprising that Photoshopping is the worst it's ever been. Desperate times call for desperate measures.

Does an increased use of Photoshopping also reflect our unattainable cultural ideals? Of course. But it's time to start acknowledging that the conversation is much more complex than that. Raising awareness about why it is bad to alter images in mainstream ads and media (especially print) oversimplifies the problem.

What happens when you take Photoshop out of the equation? We're left with models and performers who are still under an enormous amount of pressure to go to enormous lengths to make their bodies look a certain way. And while men feel these pressures increasingly these days, the pervasive use of image alteration software is only one small piece of the strong, sexist undercurrent that continues to dehumanize women as objects in the vast majority of these images and videos in our popular culture.

Taking a public stand against Photoshop does not unpack these issues in a meaningful way, and frankly, might make it worse for models, actresses, singers, and other performers, for whom the pressures to alter their bodies will only be heightened.

None of this is to say that I don't believe getting ad agencies and media to promote more realistic representations of women and men would be an amazing accomplishment. But it is not realistic and it is not the most practical use of our time, energy, and resources. However much it pains me to say this: Let's leave Photoshop alone. It's time to widen our lens.
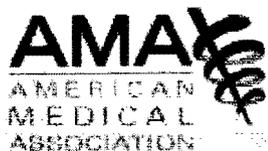
PHOTO GALLERIES

AMA Adopts New Policies at Annual Meeting

For immediate release
June 21, 2011

CHICAGO - The American Medical Association (AMA), the nation's largest physician group, voted today at it: Annual Meeting to adopt the following new policies.

NUTRITION COUNSELING FOR PREGNANT AND POSTPARTUM PATIENTS: The AMA voted to encourage physician referrals of pregnant and recent postpartum patients for nutrition counseling and to advocate fo: the extension of health insurance coverage for nutrition counseling for all pregnant and recent postpartum patients.

A recent study found that at one year postpartum, almost 25 percent of women retained at least 10 pound of the weight gained during pregnancy. Insurance coverage for the cost of nutrition counseling for postpart women currently varies.

"Many women who are pregnant or who have recently given birth could benefit from nutrition counseling," said AMA Board Member Barbara L. McAneny, MD. "By including nutrition counseling in the list of pregnanc) related services covered by health insurance, pregnant women and new mothers can better achieve and maintain a healthy weight for themselves and their children."

BODY IMAGE AND ADVERTISING TO YOUTH: Advertisers commonly alter photographs to enhance the appearance of models' bodies, and such alterations can contribute to unrealistic expectations of appropria body image - especially among impressionable children and adolescents. A large body of literature links exposure to media-propagated images of unrealistic body image to eating disorders and other child and adolescent health problems.

The AMA adopted new policy to encourage advertising associations to work with public and private sector organizations concerned with child and adolescent health to develop guidelines for advertisements, especially those appearing in teen-oriented publications, that would discourage the altering of photograph a manner that could promote unrealistic expectations of appropriate body image.

"The appearance of advertisements with extremely altered models can create unrealistic expectations of appropriate body image. In one image, a model's waist was slimmed so severely, her head appeared to be wider than her waist," said Dr. McAneny. "We must stop exposing impressionable children and teenagers to advertisements portraying models with body types only attainable with the help of photo editing software.

DIETARY GUIDELINES FOR INCARCERATED POPULATIONS: The AMA today adopted new policy recommend guidelines on menu planning be issued for incarcerated adolescents and adults to address their unique nutritional needs.

"Various challenges exist in providing affordable, palatable and low security-risk foods for inmates that wil also meet their nutritive needs, and current menu planning practices vary across correctional and detentic facilities," said Dr. McAneny. "Implementing dietary guidelines created specifically to address the needs of incarcerated populations could play a role in averting and managing chronic disease."

Nearly 2.3 million Americans are incarcerated in state and federal prisons and local jails, and the basic ne of inmates, including food and health care, must be met. With a high concentration of long-term inmates i these facilities, the lack of consistent guidelines has led to concerns about the nutritional adequacy of the diets as a means of averting and managing chronic disease.

RESIDENTS' AND FELLOWS' BILL OF RIGHTS: The AMA today adopted a "Residents' and Fellows' Bill of Righ which outlines the rights of residents and fellows in the areas of education, supervision, evaluations of performance, safe workplace, compensation and benefits, duty hours, complaints and appeals process, an protection when reporting violations. The policy was adopted as part of a report from the AMA's Council or Medical Education.

"Medical residents and fellows deserve a safe and supportive place to work and learn, with the resources a rest they need to best serve their patients," said AMA Board Member Rebecca Patchin, MD. "The hands-on experience gained during residencies and fellowships is critical for physicians, and this bill of rights lays ou clear, unifying standards for these programs across the country."

ENHANCING ATTENTION TO PERSONAL QUALITIES IN MEDICAL EDUCATION: Personal qualities, in additior academic achievement, are important in determining who will succeed in a career in medicine. The AMA passed policy to work with organizations and medical schools to encourage improved assessment of person qualities in medical school applicants, review the ways in which medical schools communicate the importance of personal qualities among applicants, and continue research on the personal qualities most pertinent to success as a medical student and as a physician. The policy was adopted on the recommendat of a report from the AMA's Council on Medical Education.

"There are many personal qualities in addition to academic excellence that can help to make a physician successful," said AMA Board Member Rebecca Patchin, MD. "Medical schools can benefit by considering the range of academic and personal qualities when evaluating medical school applicants."

STANDARDIZED USER INTERFACE FOR ELECTRONIC MEDICAL RECORDS: Responding to physicians' concern that electronic medical record (EMR) products are difficult to navigate and use for retrieving important patient information, the AMA voted today to advocate for the standardization of key elements of EMR interface design.

EMR user interfaces are comprised of icons, screen menus, keyboard shortcuts and control sequences that make it possible for physicians to interact with the software or operating system. Studies have documente physicians' difficulty in efficiently locating critical patient information in EMR systems due to poor user interface design.

"Efficiency is a key requirement for integrating EMR products in the hectic workflow of clinical practice," s AMA Board Member Steven J. Stack, MD. "Standardized EMR interface designs will help physicians working multiple facilities with different EMR systems better navigate and use EMRs to help their patients."

The AMA will also advocate that medical facilities and health systems work toward standardized login procedures, continued physician education and more research on EMR user interface design that can impro the quality, safety and efficiency of health care.

# # #

Media Contacts:

Shannon O'Brien or Heather Lasher Todd
AMA Media Relations
Office; (312) 464-4430
shannon.obrien@ama-assn.org
heather.lasher.todd@ama-assn.org