

Young, slim, sensual and happy—that's what women are like, according to the adverts

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As the Doctor in Sociology of the UPV/EHU-University of the Basque Country Laura Bilbao-Gómez admits, it was a bus shelter that prompted her to do her thesis on the image of the woman's body in advertising and its interaction with consumption. More specifically, the trigger was an advert that appeared in the bus shelter added to an image she later spotted in a shop window opposite, followed by another one inside the shop itself. The three images repeated and reinforced the stereotype of female beauty.

"In the three images appeared young, beautiful, slim women and they all echoed the same message: look after yourself if you want to feel young, beautiful and sought after. At that moment, I decided to research the forms of interaction and internalisation being proposed by the model of female beauty appearing in the adverts around us all the time," explained Bilbao. She went on to say, "And the fact is, this stereotype is not only shown in [fashion magazines](#) and [beauty products](#), it is present in all kinds of mediums and is related to certain consumer products not directly linked to beauty."

Laura Bilbao highlights pharmacies among the spaces where that ideal woman is repeated. "We associate pharmacies with health, so the fact that the same stereotype of the woman present in other [consumer products](#) appears not only in the products that are sold in pharmacies but also in the advertising they display further reinforces and promotes the message that links that female body image with health."

Magazines, urban environments and interviews

To do her PhD thesis, Bilbao studied a selection of advertising texts published in celebrity gossip and romance magazines (Hola, Pronto, Lecturas, Diez Minutos, etc.) and fashion magazines (Vogue, Cosmopolitan, Marie Claire, Elle, etc.) And, to a lesser extent, also the audiovisual adverts coming mainly from television. As the researcher points out, "what they all share is that they are based on dealing with the woman's body in practices and attitudes that are linked to beauty product use."

Likewise, Bilbao conducted a piece of field work based on the production of photographic material using the [urban environment](#); this covered transition (advertising hoardings along roads and highways) as well as leisure and consumption (shop windows and pharmacies, adverts in shopping centres) and overall (façades, public transport shelters, means of transport, etc.). Related to this, the author produced "a set of visual maps based on itineraries made in five cities: Barakaldo, Bilbao, Santander, Madrid and London". The researcher stressed that in the urban environment the advertising relating to the female body is not only geared towards beauty products, "but towards all kinds of products not related to consumption of this type: cars, homes, electronic devices, etc."

In order to compare the presence of representations of this type of "beautiful woman" through material of this type with the views of those who are being targeted by them, she conducted qualitative social research by means of personal interviews and discussion groups; "sessions in which they were presented adverts selected in advance to try to take to a deeper level the discourses and social representations that are built up around the social imperative in the quest for beauty," explained the author.

One of the conclusions she drew from the study is that the image of the female body used in advertising [?]is associated with physical qualities (youth and slimness) and emotional qualities (happiness and sensuality)[?]. She also pointed out that these women [?]realise that the body is a stereotyped ideal, but that does not prompt them to stop buying the anti-aging cream, for example[?].

Both the research methods and the results and conclusions have been included in the thesis entitled *El cuerpo, imagen de una cultura: la representación del cuerpo de "la mujer" en la publicidad. Un acercamiento hacia la construcción de la imagen femenina actual como escaparate de su identidad*. [The body, image of a culture: the representation of "the woman" in [advertising](#). An approach towards the construction of the current female image as the showcase of her identity]. The author has already published various papers connected with the thesis and has expressed her intention to go on working on the subject: [?]Firstly I am planning to continue working on itineraries in cities, with the collaboration of my thesis supervisor, Prof Andrés Dávila, and secondly, I want to publish a paper on the pornographic eroticism underlying the female stereotype that links beauty with sensuality."

More information: Laura Bilbao-Gómez, "El cuerpo bello como inscripción identitaria de la mujer en publicidad" [The beautiful body as an identity inscription of women in advertising], published in 2013 by the journal *Inguruak* (volume 55-56, pages 1350 to 1364) and can be accessed at: www.avsp.es/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=433Arevista-inguruak&catid=133Asecciones&lang=es

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