

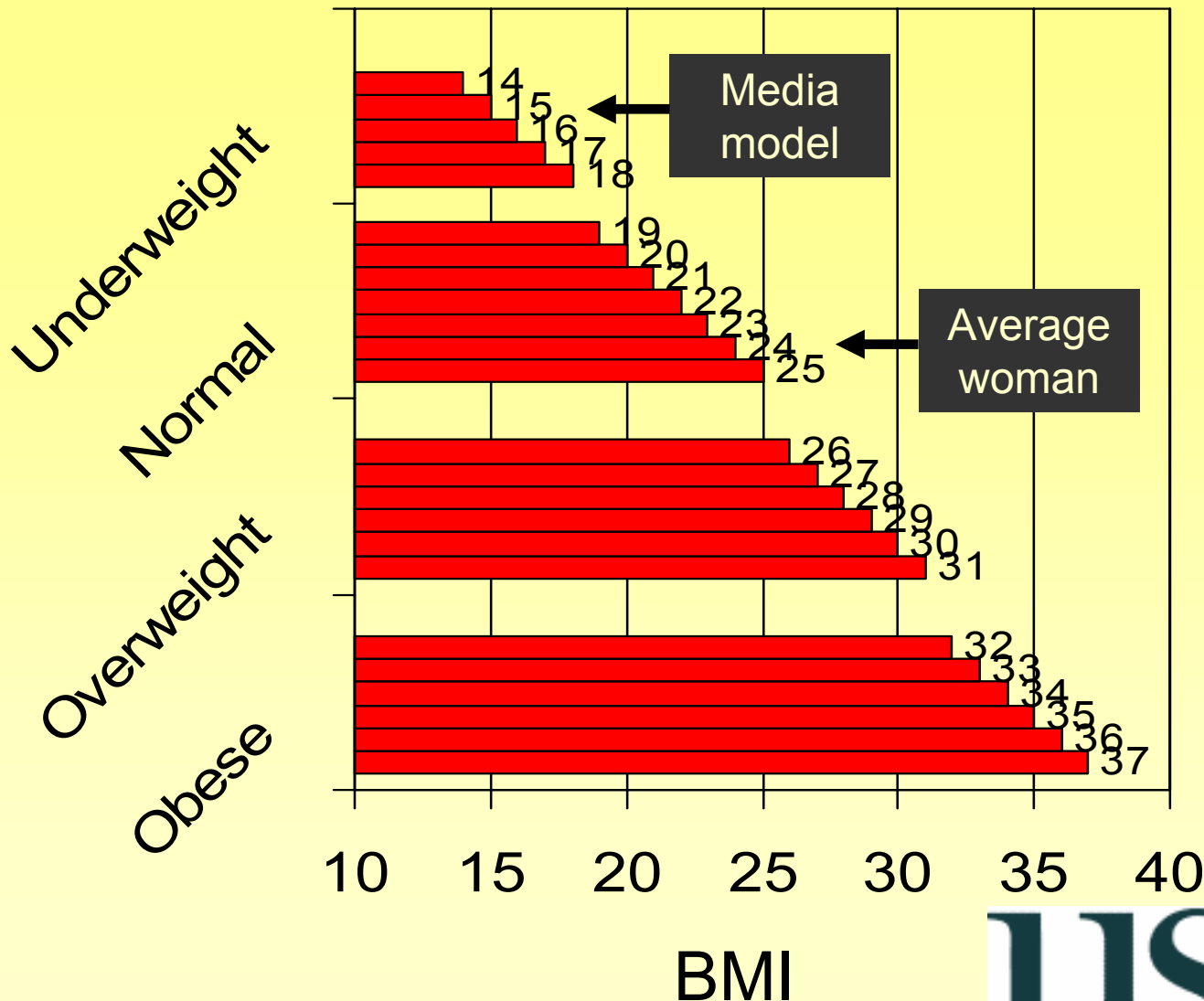
# Does Size Matter?

The impact of idealized media models on girls', women's and men's body image

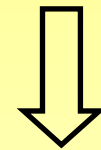
*Helga Dittmar*

*Frontiers in Research, University of Ottawa, 2006*

# Healthy and unhealthy



Weight  
relative  
to height



Body Mass  
Index (BMI)

# Why worry?

## Media models' body size *versus* reality

- Gap between body ideal ✂ actual body
- Exposed to 3,000+ ads a day
- Media models construct “reality” ≠ real
- Unhealthy and unreal body ideal
  - Biologically inappropriate
  - Artificial

# Why worry?

Comparisons with media models



Body dissatisfaction



Unhealthy & extreme  
body-shaping behaviours

# The research

## Link between media exposure and negative body image

- Greater body dissatisfaction in girls and women
- More disordered eating behaviours
- Direction of link?

# The research

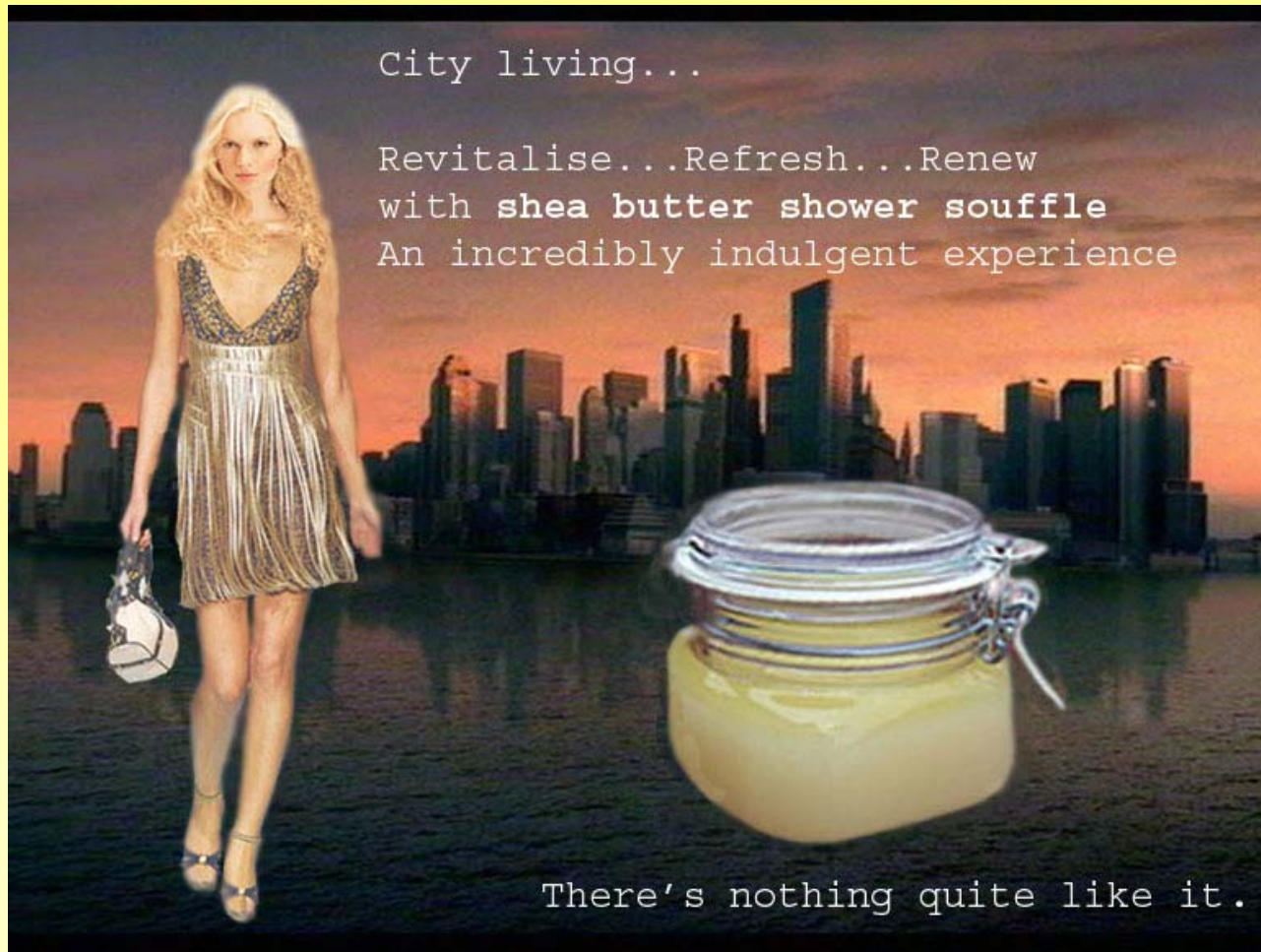
## Media exposure experiments

- Cause of body dissatisfaction
- Immediate impact on body image
- Compare people who have been **exposed to idealized media models (E)** with people who have **not been exposed to models (NE)**
- Systematic difference between **(E)** & **(NE)**?

# Exposure experiment: How?

- Study on advertising effectiveness
- Respondents see advertisements featuring
  - thin models OR
  - average-size models OR
  - no model (control baseline)
- Rate advertisements
  - liking for product, buying intention
- Report how they “feel right now”
  - anxiety about body size and body parts

# Ad with thin model



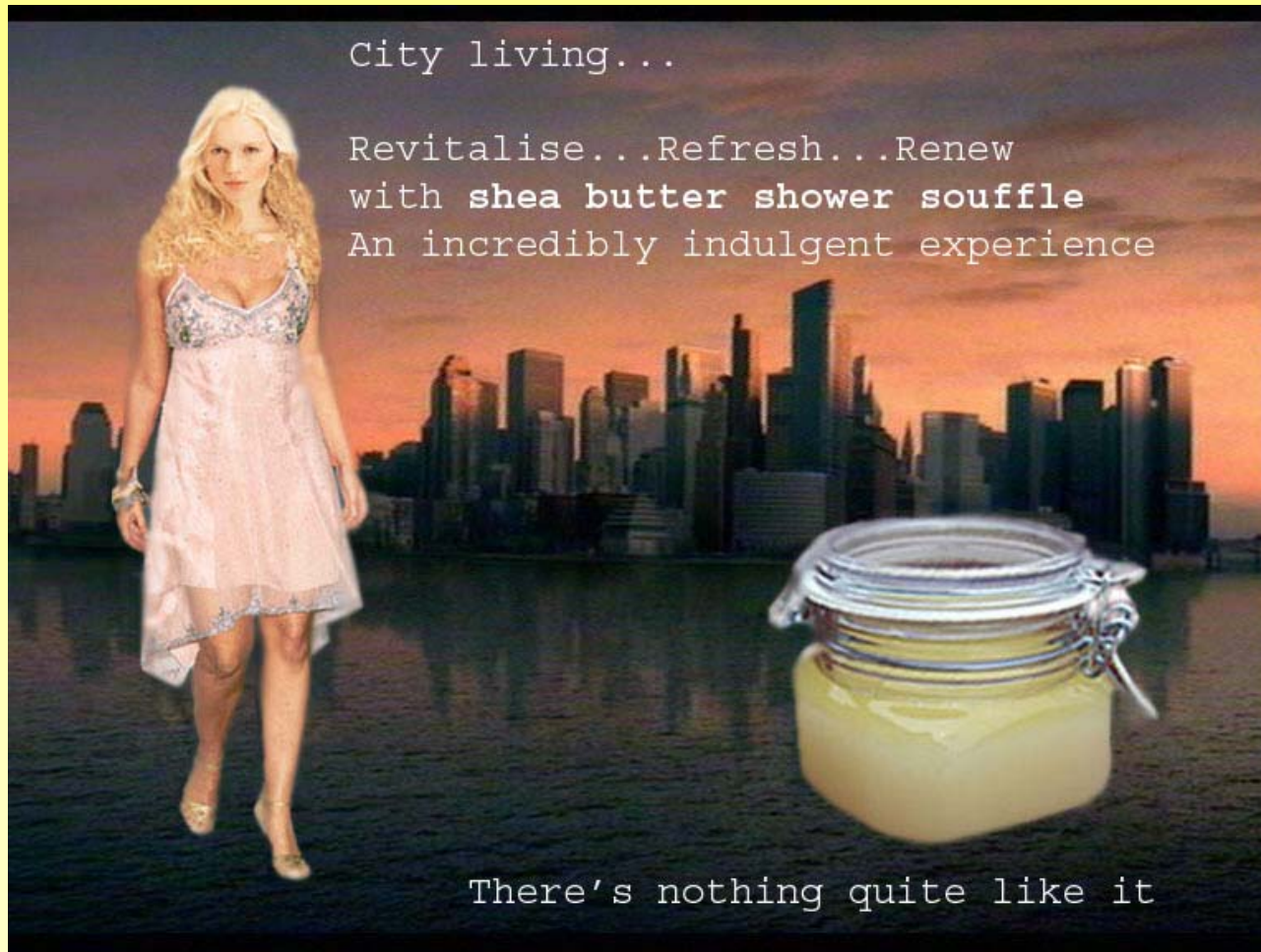
City living...

Revitalise...Refresh...Renew  
with **shea butter shower souffle**  
An incredibly indulgent experience

There's nothing quite like it.

The advertisement features a thin model with long blonde hair, wearing a shimmering, sequined, sleeveless dress and high-heeled sandals, walking on a city street at dusk. In the foreground, a glass jar with a metal clasp lid contains a yellow, creamy substance. The background shows a city skyline with tall buildings under a sunset sky.

# Ad average-size model



City living...

Revitalise...Refresh...Renew  
with **shea butter shower souffle**  
An incredibly indulgent experience

There's nothing quite like it

# Ad without model (control)

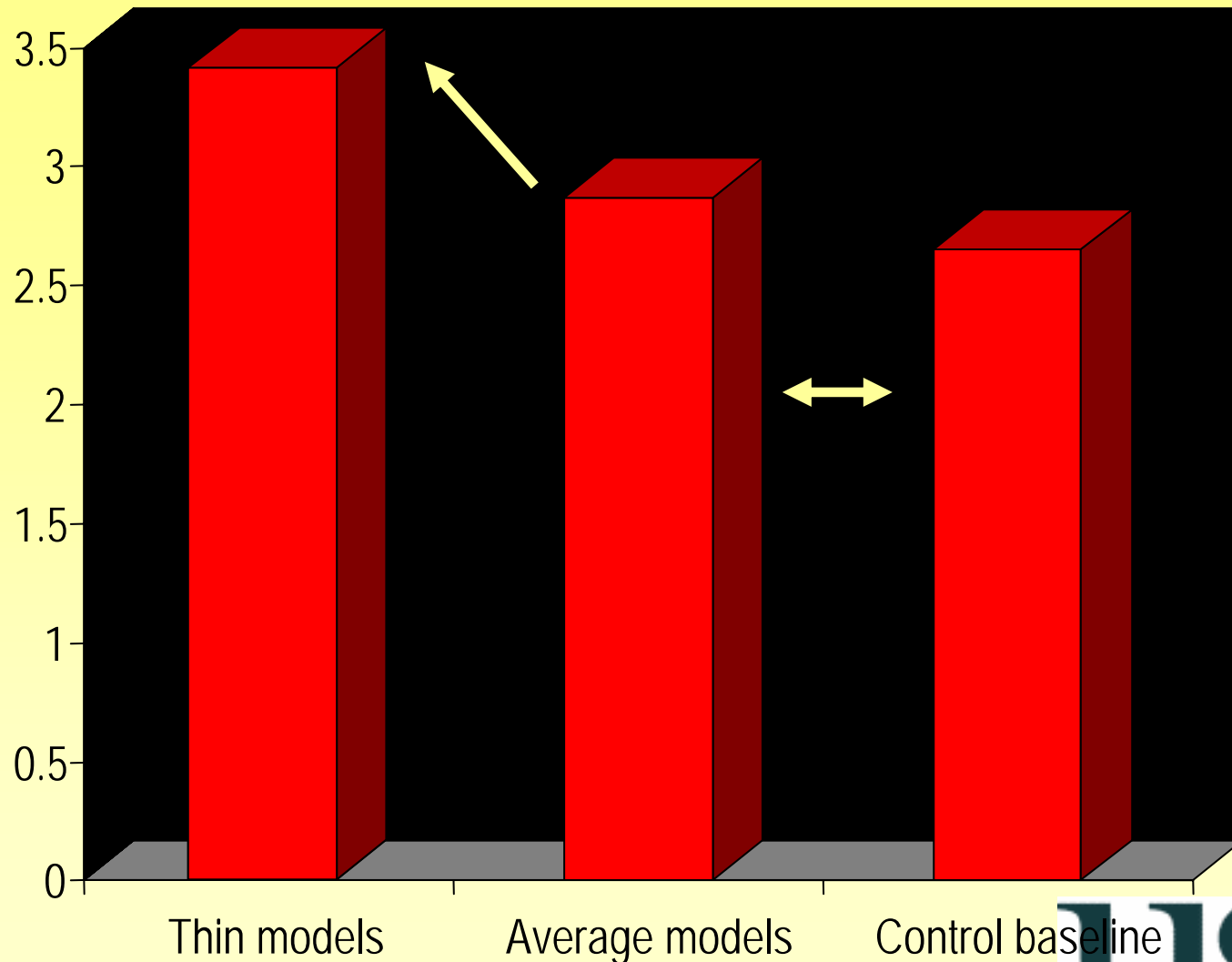


# The evidence: Women

- Impact of media models on body-focused anxiety (weight, waist, hips, thighs)
- Over 800 respondents, including students, teachers, fashion and advertising employees, women with eating disorder history (publications available on request\*)
- Vulnerability factors

\* Dittmar, in press; Dittmar & Halliwell, 2005; Dittmar & Howard, 2004a, 2004b; Halliwell & Dittmar, 2004, 2006

# Body anxiety after ads



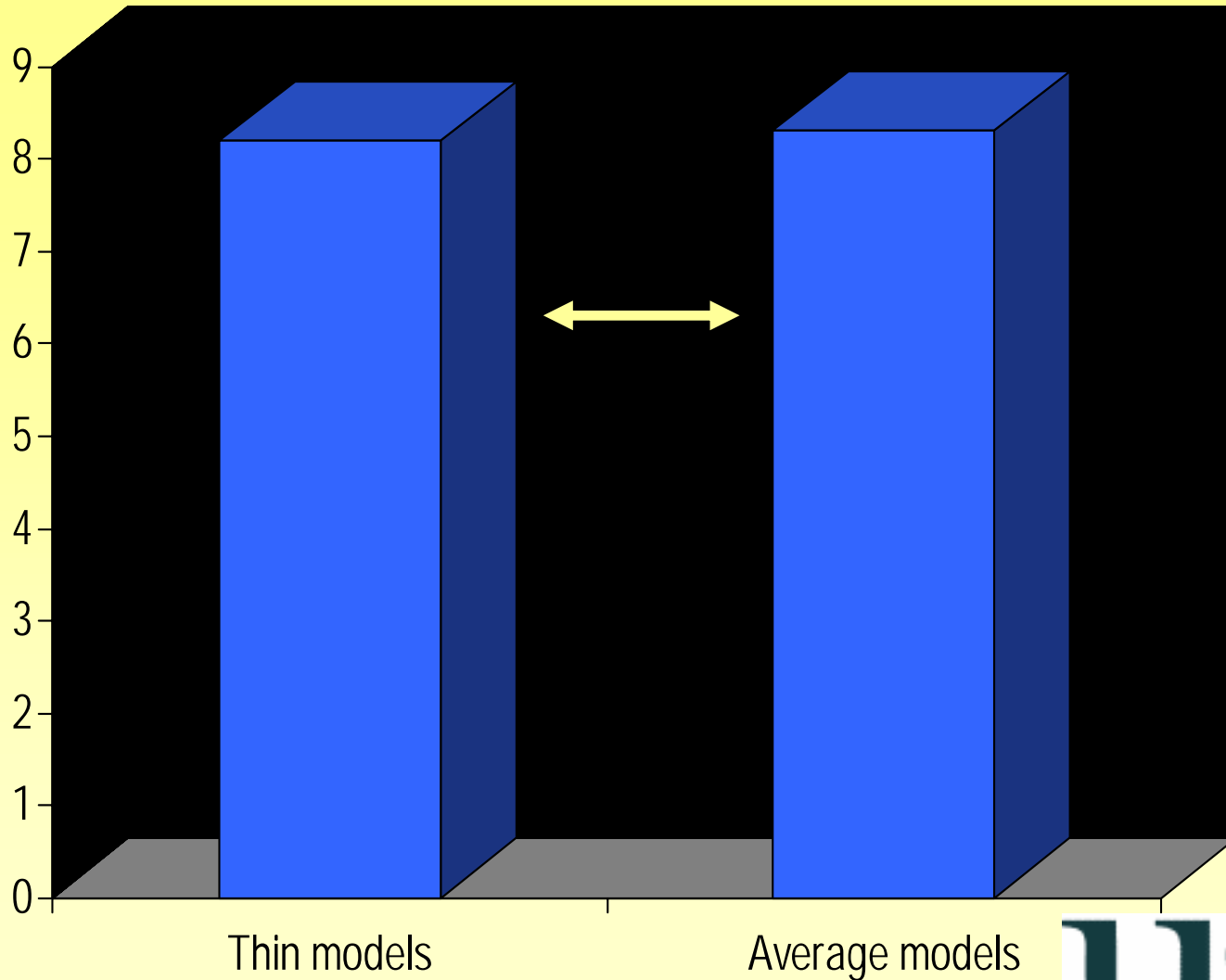
Thin models >  
other ads

Average-size  
models =  
no models  
baseline

# Thin media models

- Women report greater anxiety about their body size and weight
- Negative impact on many women
- Advertising effectiveness?
- Advertisers claim “thin models sell”
- Our research = first systematic studies to examine claim

# Advertising effectiveness



Average-size models = Thin models

True for different products

personal care  
make-up  
diet foods

# Interim conclusion

- Thin models ➡ body dissatisfaction in many women, at least short-term
- Average-size models ➡ no such impact
- Perceived advertising effectiveness not compromised by average-size models
- No need for advertisers to use thin models

# The evidence: Girls

- Dolls embody female body ideal
- Exposure experiment with images of dolls
- 5-8-year-old girls
  - Year 1, Year 2, Year 3
- First exposure experiment with such young girls (publication available on request\*)
- Does exposure to images of dolls cause body dissatisfaction?

\* Dittmar, Halliwell, & Ive (2006)

# The evidence: Girls

- Girls heard story about “Mira”
- Picture book featuring images of
  - Thin dolls (Barbie) OR
  - Average-size dolls (Emme) OR
  - No dolls (control baseline)
- After exposure, measures of
  - Body dissatisfaction
  - Desire to have a thinner body

# Picture book with thin doll

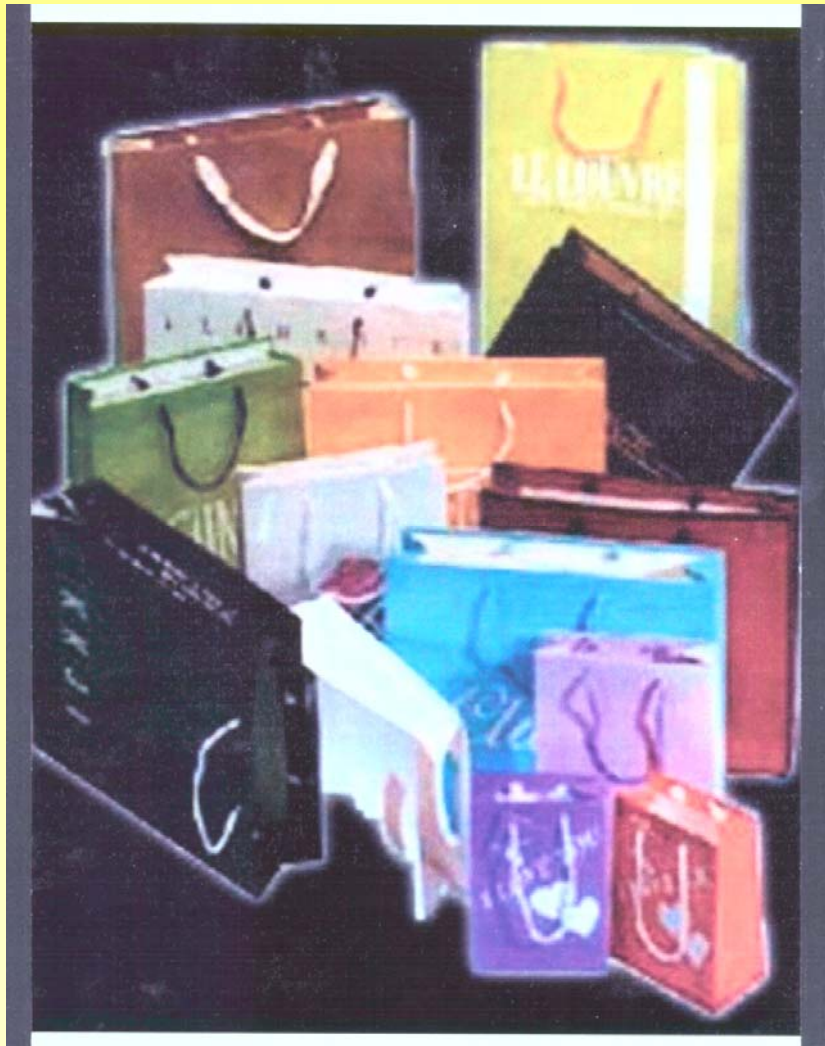


# Picture book average-size doll



Taken from Dittmar (in press), image reproduced with kind permission of Tonner Inc. & Emme Model Agency

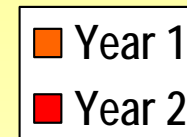
# Picture book without doll



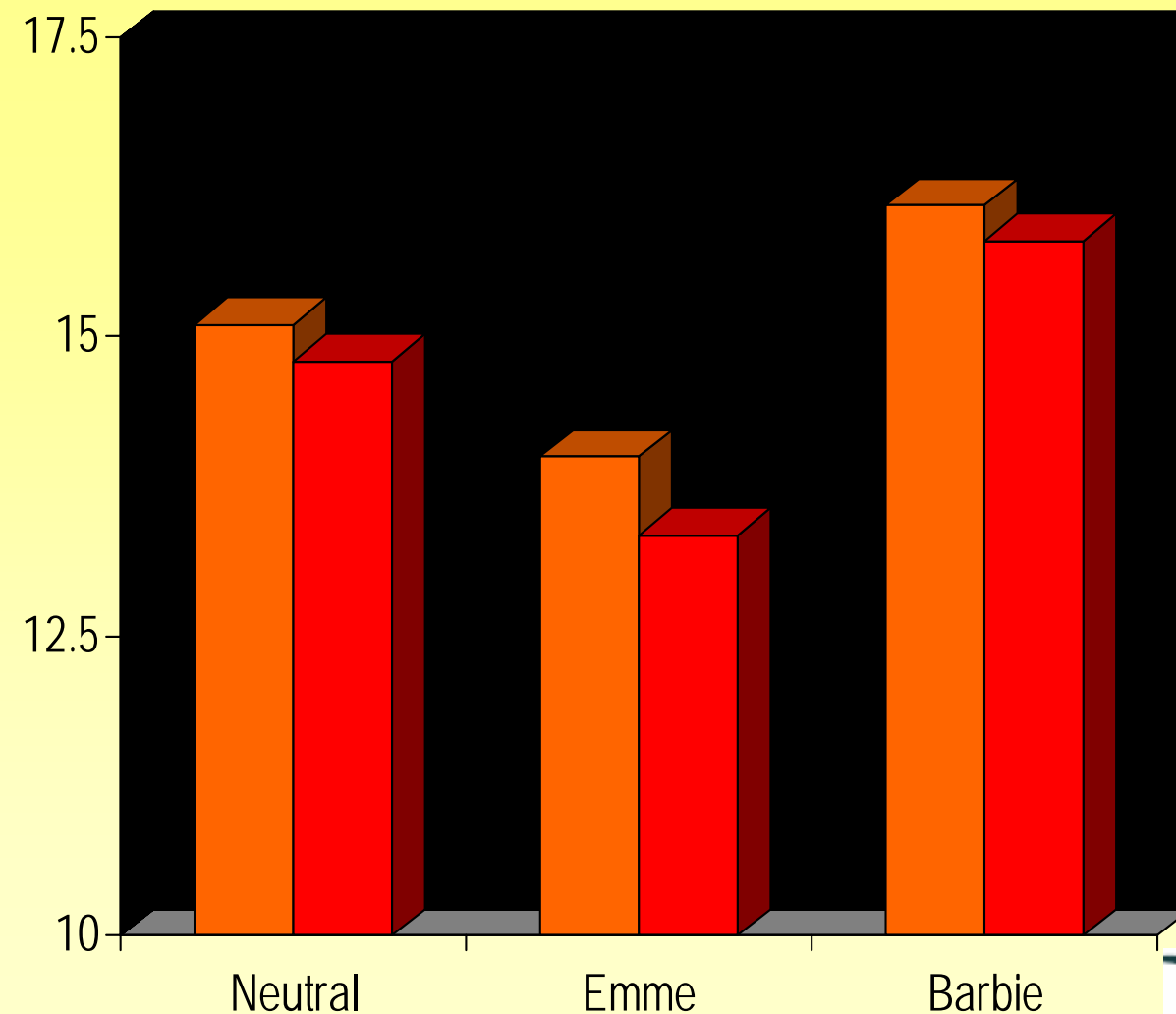
# Body dissatisfaction

Year 1 = Year 2

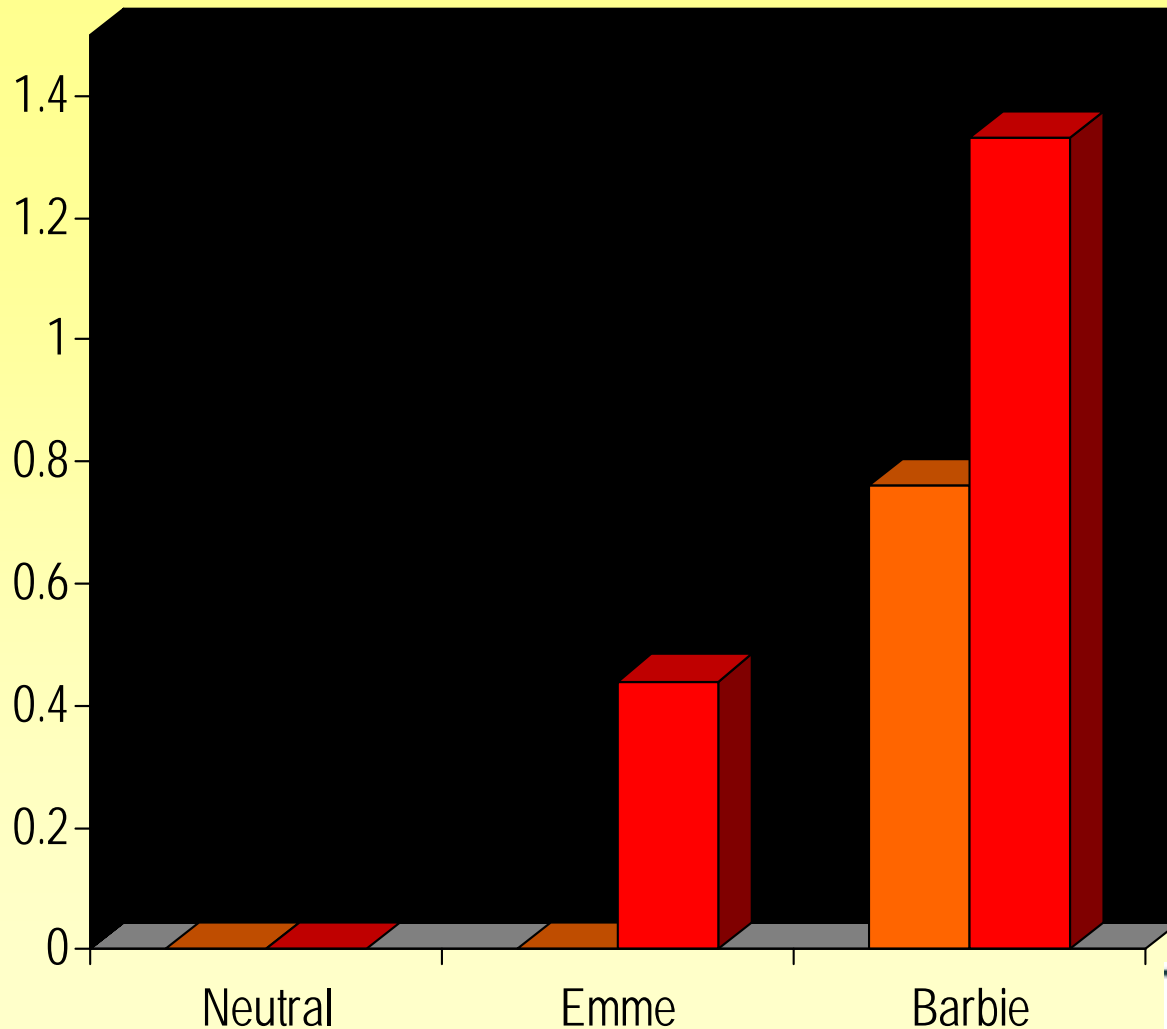
Body dissatisfaction higher after thin dolls



Year 3 no effect

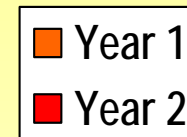


# Desire for thinner body



Year 1 > Year 2

Desire for thinner body higher after thin dolls than other images



Year 3 no effect

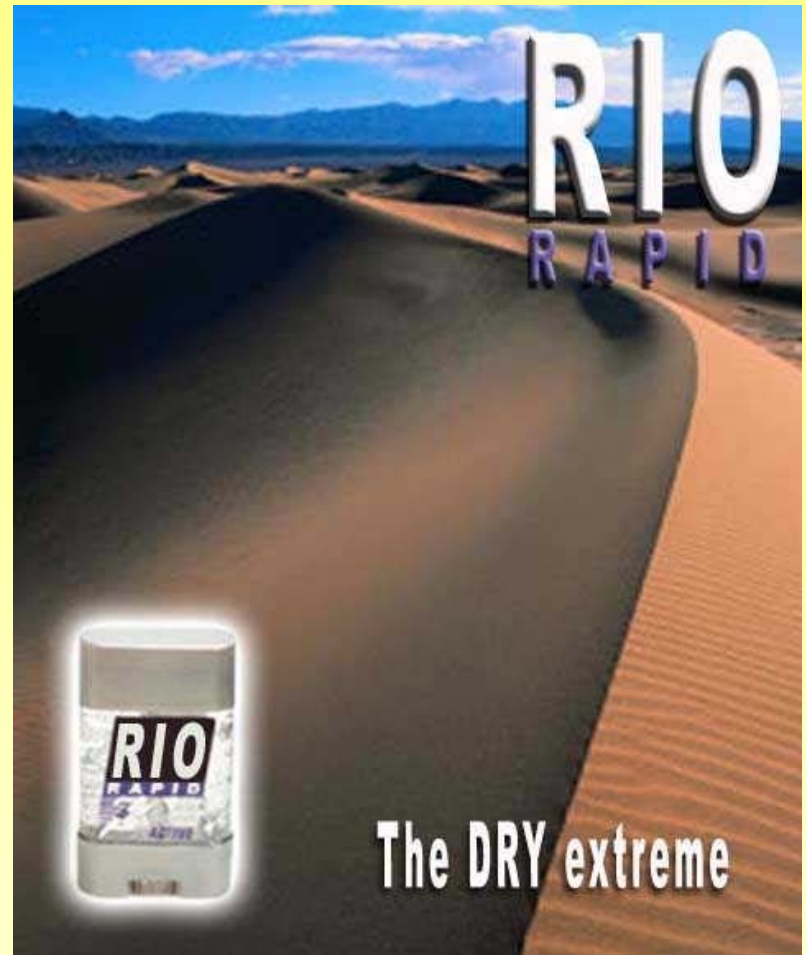
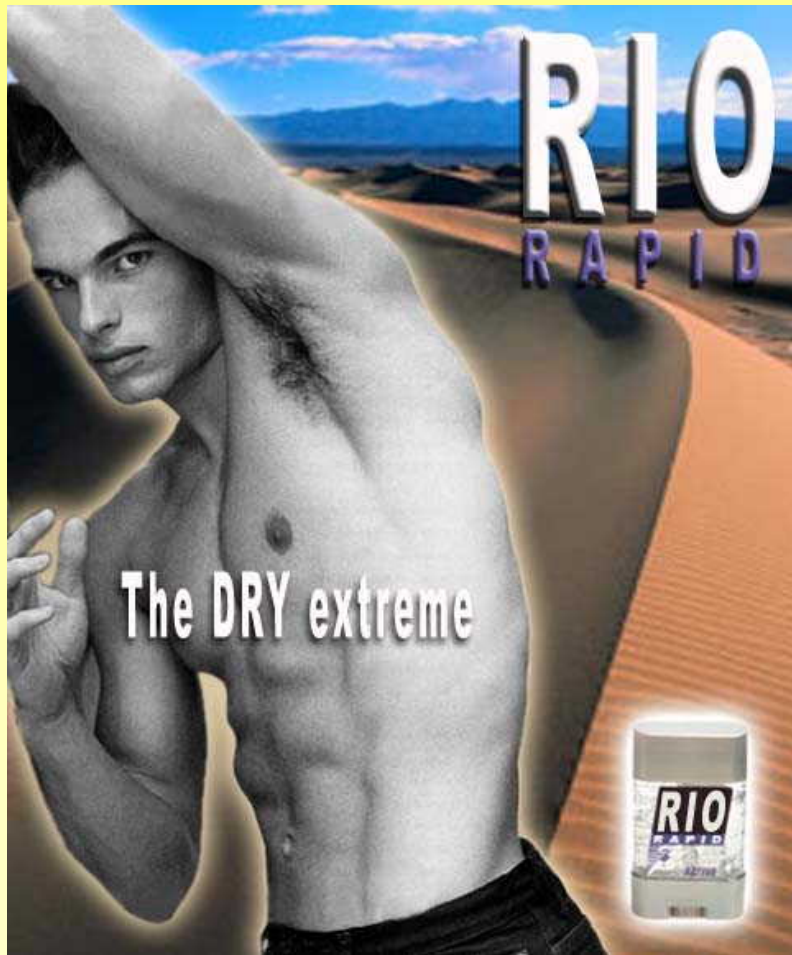
# Interim conclusion

- Exposure to thin doll images causes in 5-7-year-old girls
  - Higher body dissatisfaction
  - Greater desire for a thinner body
- Negative exposure effect no longer evident in 8-year-old girls
- Dolls with healthy body size  
➔ no negative effects

# The evidence: Men

- Growing concern with body image and appearance in men
- Increase in idealised male media models
- Male body ideal
  - Lean and tall
  - Muscular upper body
  - V-shaped torso, broad shoulders
- Emerging evidence that
  - Media exposure affects young men's body image
  - Pursuit of muscular body ideal linked with unhealthy behaviours

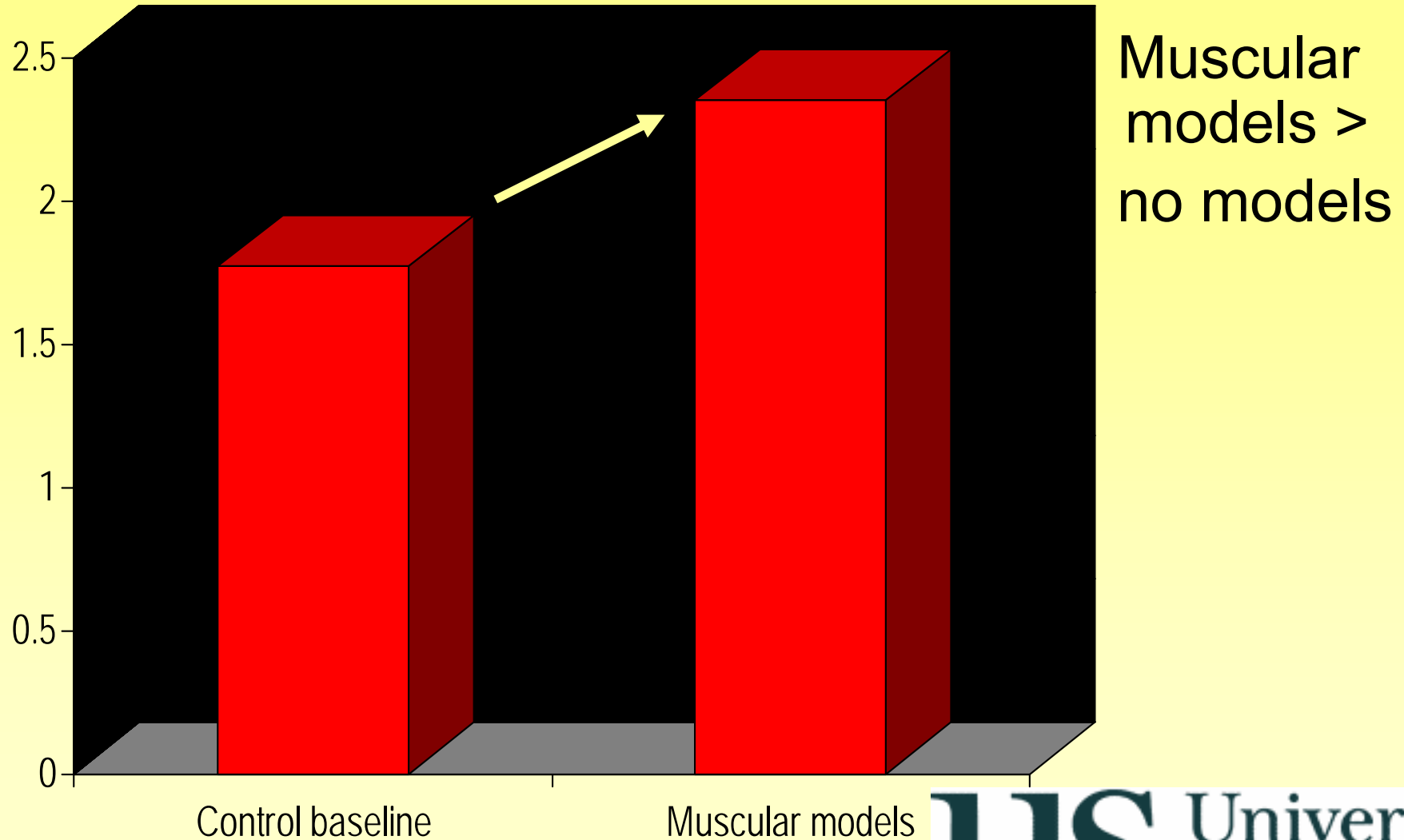
# Ads with/out male model



# The evidence: Men

- Similar experimental procedure as for women
- More than 130 young men as respondents (paper available on request\*)
- Respondents see advertisements featuring
  - Muscular male models OR
  - No models (control baseline)
- Body anxiety with respect to male ideal body (muscle tone, shoulders, chest, body build)

# Body anxiety after ads



# Interim conclusion

- Greater anxiety about muscularity and body build after models
- Muscular male models cause body dissatisfaction in young men, at least short-term
- Negative exposure effects occur also for men

# Overall conclusion

- Impact of idealized media models on girls', women's and men's body image often negative
- Body dissatisfaction can lead to unhealthy body-shaping behaviours
  - Extreme dieting, disordered eating
  - Cosmetic surgery
  - Abuse of medication and drugs (laxatives, steroids)
  - Extreme exercising

# Book in press

## Consumer Culture, Identity and Well-Being

- Well-being & Identity
- Material possessions
- Buying motives
- Materialistic value
- Compulsive buying
- Body ideals, media
- Children

Ψ Psychology Press 2007

# Journal articles

E-mail [h.e.dittmar@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:h.e.dittmar@sussex.ac.uk)

- Dittmar, H. & Halliwell, E. (2005). The role of self-beliefs in women's responses to idealised media images. Funded by the UK's Economic and Social Research Council's (ESRC) grant RES-000-22-0774. A research report detailing the main findings can be downloaded at [www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre](http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre).
- Dittmar, H., Halliwell, E., & Ive, S. (2006). Does Barbie make girls want to be thin? The effect of experimental exposure to images of dolls on the body image of 5-8-year-old girls. *Developmental Psychology*, 42, 283-292.
- Dittmar, H., & Howard, S. (2004a). Professional hazards? The impact of model's body size on advertising effectiveness and women's body-focused anxiety in professions that do and do not emphasize the cultural ideal of thinness. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 43, 1-33.
- Dittmar, H. & Howard, S. (2004b). Ideal-body internalization and social comparison tendency as moderators of thin media models' impact on women's body-focused anxiety. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 23, 768-791.
- Dittmar, H., Phillips, M., & Halliwell, E. (2006). When men think 'muscular' and feel bad: Acute exposure to idealized media models as a cause of men's ideal-body self-discrepancies and body dissatisfaction. Manuscript submitted for publication.
- Halliwell, E. & Dittmar, H. (2004). Does size matter? The impact of model's body size on advertising effectiveness and women's body-focused anxiety. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 23, 105-132. Special issue on Media and Body Image.
- Halliwell, E., & Dittmar, H. (2005). The role of self-improvement and self-evaluation motives in social comparisons with idealised female bodies in the media. *Body Image*, 2, 249-261.
- Halliwell, E., & Dittmar, H. (2006). The role of appearance-related self-discrepancies for young adults' affect, body image, and emotional eating: A comparison of fixed-item and respondent-generated self-discrepancy measures. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 32, 447-458.
- Halliwell, E., Dittmar, H., & Howe, J. (2005). The impact of advertisements featuring ultra-thin or average-size models on women with a history of eating disorders. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 15(5), 406-413.