

The ideal woman

[Media](#), [Television](#)



The Ideal Woman's Body The 21st century's North American society is dominated by the obsessive desire of women to look like society's, media-influenced, portrayal of the " ideal body. " This is a result of the way society has objectified women as just " sexual bodies; " largely for the gratification and enjoyment of men. Not only is the media creating these ideal bodies for women to look up to and idolize, but, they are also providing ways in which to obtain these bodies such as weight-loss programs, cosmetic surgeries, gym memberships, and more. These approaches to change women's " imperfect" bodies also create a mindset that the body can be controlled which results in self-hatred and self-loathing when one fails to look like the idealistic body (Wendell). An analysis into the aspects of today's popular culture which includes advertisements, entertainment such as television shows, and the various methods to try to control one's body, is a definite confirmation of how society objectifies women's bodies which results in the extensive negative effects on women. Advertising is everywhere. It is all around us; whether we're watching TV, there are advertisements shown during commercials, walking down the street, there are advertisements on billboards being displayed, or riding the bus, there are advertisements posted onto the side of the bus. Everyday, people encounter a numerous amount of advertising and a lot of this advertising involves thin, beautiful women. Some of these advertisements don't even involve the faces of these women, just their bodies; this is called dismemberment, when only parts of the body are shown (Campbell, week 6). By doing so, companies are manipulating the bodies of women as objects to sell their products through the sexualization of their bodies. As a result, women begin to compare their

own bodies to the bodies they see in all these advertisements. This leads to women feeling dissatisfied with their bodies and developing an obsessive desire to change their bodies into the beauty ideals established by society. In an experiment to conduct the correlation between exposure to thin-ideal advertisements and body dissatisfaction, Bessenoff concluded that "Exposure to thin-ideal advertisements affected weight concerns, mood, self-esteem, and depression." (247) The beauty ideals that society has created haven't only caused women to idolize these bodies but changed the definition of what "normal" is (Campbell, week 6). The image of the media's ideal body has given women a new definition of what normal looks like. What women think is normal does not match the media's definition of normal; "the average North American woman is much fatter than the average woman we see on television" (Wendell, 55). This statistic proves that the media has caused women to believe that their definition of normal or average is wrong. As a result, "80-90% of women are unhappy with their bodies" (Campbell, week 6), because average weighted women see themselves as overweight or abnormal when they're really not solely on account of the media's portrayal of what normal should look like. In turn, this causes considerable damage to the self-esteem, body dissatisfaction, and mood of those women (Bessenoff, 247). The lines between what idealistic is and what realistic have become blurred (Campbell, week 6) in this "media soaked" society that we live in today (Wendell, 54). The "perfect" idealistic body the media is portraying is very unrealistic and incredibly hard to obtain. An example of how unrealistic these body ideals are is the body of the very popular and well-known Barbie doll. Barbie dolls are targeted towards young children and the study

conducted by Brownell and Napolitano shows that adults are not the only ones exposed to these "unrealistic ideals for shape and weight" (295). The study showed that in order for "young, healthy adult women" to attain the ideal body size portrayed by Barbie, they must increase their height by 24 in., chest by 5 in., neck length by 3.2 in., and the most unbelievable requirement of them all is to decrease their waist size by 6 in. (Brownell and Napolitano, 296). These findings affirm how absurd and unrealistic these body ideals are and how impossible it is to achieve them. In today's popular culture, watching TV is one of the foremost sources of entertainment people enjoy on an everyday basis. These TV series elicit representations of sexualized female bodies and are in support of the beauty and body ideals created by our media soaked society. The majority of women who star on TV series, the popular ones especially, are all thin, beautiful, and meet these standard beauty ideals. They have been chosen to capture the attention of viewers through their body; to make women want the bodies they have. Not only does TV entertainment display and support these beauty ideals but it also provides shows that teach people how to obtain these idealistic bodies such as reality shows where actual people go through these processes as test demonstrations. These reality shows are causing more people to conform to these unrealistic ideals as they watch these "abnormal" people transform into the "beautiful" body ideals that society approves of. Reality TV shows such as *The Biggest Loser*, *The Last 10 Pounds*, and *Extreme Makeover* are examples of TV series that encourage people to conform to these beauty ideals. *The Biggest Loser* is a TV series where 2 celebrity trainers are hired to whip the contestants of the show into shape. The fact

that they're all regarded as "losers" is a perfect example of the influence of the standardized beauty ideals set by the media. The contestants of the show are called losers because they are overweight and don't fit into the standard beauty ideal. These people should not be called such a degrading name on the sole basis that they don't look "beautiful" in the eyes of society. These contestants are overweight and might not be healthy because of it but they are still people just like anyone else, not losers. The Last 10 Pounds is a show that displays the extent to which women idolize these ideal bodies of society. Contestants of this show are not overweight or obese; they just want to lose those 10 pounds for reasons such as fitting into a slim dress or that nice pair of skinny jeans. These women are the results of how media-influenced body ideals affect women. The most severe show that promotes society's beauty ideals is Extreme Makeover. This chosen people of this show are physically transformed into the beauty ideals of society not by exercising and eating right but through surgeries. This show encourages women to endure the pain of cosmetic surgeries and even dental surgeries in order to become "beautiful." All three of these examples are proof of the extents to which the media is influencing and having negative effects on women's self-image and satisfaction with their bodies in comparison to the beauty ideals of society. People with disabilities are the ones who suffer from the negative effects of body ideals. It's hard enough for normal people to try and achieve the unrealistic beauty ideals our culture has developed, let alone people with disabilities, deformities, and other actual abnormalities. These people already have issues with their body that are out of their control; seeing all these advertisements and representations of what the "ideal" body should

look like has the greatest impact on those who already don't even look plain or normal in society's eyes. The self-esteem and self-dissatisfaction is already there for people with such disabilities. Therefore, the media simply adds onto their pain and causes them to feel "frustration, shame, and sometimes self-hatred" (Wendell, 57). This leads to disabled women attempting to "regain control through dieting, bingeing, or other methods of body mutilation" which are all harmful ways to treat one's body (Odette, 43). Encouragement for the manipulation and objectification of women's bodies into society's ideal beauty images is substantially promoted by the cosmetic surgery and diet industries because of the extremely high profits. These industries rely on the "deeply held insecurities and fears" (Tucker) of women for them to make money. In order for women to feel this way, these industries advocate the importance to achieve the ideal body; and because the body ideal is so unrealistic and "unattainable for most women" (Odette, 41) the diet industry especially, rakes in a ton of money off these women who are desperately trying to fit the ideal body standard. It has been found that "ninety-eight percent of dieters regain the weight they lost" (Tucker). This statistic proves that the diet industry is a scam whose sole purpose is to make money off vulnerable women by luring them in through the need to want to look like the sexualized and objectified bodies they have displayed.