

The effects of the media on body image

[Health & Medicine](#), [Body](#)



The pressure to be thin has amplified significantly due to the growing influence of the media. Despite numerous of other factors that contribute to society's view of the ideal body image, the media by far has the largest influence on society through icons that constantly reinforce unrealistic beauty standards and idealize the thin. The media persistently glamorizes the extremely skinny, which greatly impacts how society views different body types. Pictures of impossibly thin models are continuously pasted all over billboards and magazines. The skinny are looked up to, and the obese are shunned.

Popular television shows that include overweight characters depict them either as comical outcasts or failures. There is also an abundance of television programs that focus solely on overweight individuals attempting to lose weight. For instance, *The Biggest Loser* is a very successful television series and publishing enterprise which selects participants based on body size. According to John Whyte, MD, in "Media Portrayal of People Who are Obese," "The Biggest Loser promotes the perception that obesity is caused by individual failure rather than a mixture of individual, environment, and genetic sources. The popular television show also suggests that obese people are fat because they are lazy and that the only way for them to be respected and accepted is to lose the extra weight. These type of shows portray obesity in a certain way that promotes negative perceptions and fosters prejudice against the obese. Viewers don't consciously think about it, but the more they are around the media that subtly promotes these perceptions, the more likely the perceptions are to be engrained in their

minds. Moreover, the high standards of beauty that the media implements daily are nearly impossible for the majority of people to meet.

Even though the average American is at least slightly overweight or obese, popular media pushes out derogatory themes that discriminate unfairly against the obese. The media's strong influence on society against bigger body types has caused numerous of dire effects on the way people think today. As stated by Shelly Grabe of Medical News Today in her article "Concern over Strong Media Influence on Women's Body Image," researchers have recently conducted a meticulous study on the extent to which the media affects women.

They found a tremendous difference between those who were exposed to media and those who were not; the women who had been exposed reported less satisfaction with their bodies (Grabe). Exposure to media that depicts dangerously thin actresses and models significantly increases people's distress about their bodies, thereby influencing dissatisfaction and chances of engaging in unhealthy eating behaviors. Furthermore, research has "repeatedly shown that constant exposure to thin models fosters body image concerns and disordered eating" in many people.

Eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia have been steadily more common in younger generations today. Subliminal messages from the media about what the "ideal" body should look like molds the naive teenagers' mindset and influences their definitions of what is ugly and what is beautiful. There are few that escape the inundating influences of the media. In fact, "the average American sees three thousand ads per day" (Jean Kilbourne).

Therefore, the media does not just play a small role in influencing society's view on different body types.

The media relentlessly bombards society with negative connotations of the overweight and the fat, unwelcomingly shaping America's perception of the ideal body. Discrimination against body types that do not fit into the media's definition of beauty has immensely impacted society. However, the media does not have to be such a big influence. There have been a plethora of organizations that exist to help boost the self esteem of those who suffer from harmful messages sent by the media about what their bodies should look like.

According to the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance (NAAFA), a civil rights organization, was started in 1969 to "eliminate discrimination based on body size and to provide obese people with the tools for self-empowerment through public education, advocacy, and support." NAAFA delivers a message to society that belies the media's input of the ideal body type. The non-profit organization seeks to better society and to limit discrimination against the obese.

There are many similar organizations and groups that help support people who are facing discrimination from their peers. Additionally, there has been an ongoing growth of celebrities who embrace their bodies for what they are. Celebrities such as Adele serve as an excellent inspiration and role model to people who look up to them. Seventeen Magazine has also initiated a Beauty Peace Treaty which encourages females all around the world to pledge to

accept their bodies. The treaty has gained the signatures and vows of over four thousand people and continues to grow in popularity.

Even though popular media is the root of the negative impressions of the obese, society does not have to be anchored in place to those stereotypes. The media has the greatest incessant impact on society's view of the ideal body type. From advertisements to song lyrics, popular media is ubiquitous, constantly reinforcing erroneous standards of beauty and flawed perceptions of the obese. However, there are a variety of different resources that help combat the negative influences from the media and encourage those that suffer from low body image.