

The portrayal of women in the media and the effects it has on young girls

[Sociology](#), [Women](#)



Young girls of today's society are being severely negatively affected by the portrayal of women in the media. With the media playing a large role in young girl's body images, more and more girls are having a negative image of themselves. They believe they are not sexy and attractive enough according to society's standards. As a result of this they try to make themselves perfect and go to ridiculous extents to try and make that desire a reality. Girls will even decide to not pursue interests because they believe them to be unattractive and unsexy.

The media's blatant disregard for the real female physique needs to be dealt with quickly before it gets too far out of hand. Being exposed to the media daily through television, magazines, and advertisements, young girls base their body image largely off of media. The problem, however, is that the media displays unrealistic body images of women. Heavily photoshopped pictures in magazines are seen as the ideal body type, and women in movies and television shows are airbrushed to perfection. Along with the unrealistic beauty that women in the media hold, they are often dressed and posed in a provocative manner.

On many magazine covers, women are seen with little to no clothing on, with only the lettering of the magazine title stamped across their chests to cover their exposed breasts. With these images constantly being shown in nearly every aspect of their lives, young girls create the illusion that they must look like these women in order to be considered "feminine" and "sexy." Young girls begin to believe that their self-worth is based solely off of how they look.

The inaccurate portrayal of women in the media would not be a problem if young girls were not trying to model themselves after these women. As a result of the unrealistic women in the media, young girls are often dissatisfied with their own bodies. This dissatisfaction can begin at a surprisingly young age. A university of Central Florida poll (2006) found that fifty percent of 3 to 6 year olds worry that they are fat. Another study (2008) of 819 boys and 791 girls, ages 14 to 16, revealed that a far higher percentage of the girls were ashamed of their bodies than the boys. They revealed that they constantly monitor their weight, what they eat, and how often they eat. This constant policing of their bodies can potentially lead to unhealthy habits.

Girls try to make themselves look like these “ perfect” women in the media, and often times they put being “ sexy” or “ feminine” above their own health. They resort to strict diets as young as eight years old. Young girls with dress according to what the media portrays as “ sexy” and “ feminine,” even if it is clothing that is considered too provocative and mature for their age. With young girls putting their desire to be sexy above their own health, the portrayal of women in the media can lead to serious ill effects.

Often times this obsession with their body image can lead to eating disorders such as bulimia, a disorder where a girl purges her stomach immediately after eating, or anorexia, another disorder where a person will outright refuse to eat anything. They will be hospitalized for such disorders, and yet they will still find themselves to be unattractive in their own eyes. The media has drastically harmed the self-esteem of young girls.

Along with needing to become “ perfect,” young girls are not pursuing their own interests for the fear that it is “ unsexy” and “ unfeminine” according to the media. A study done by the Women’s Sports Foundation (2011) found that six girls drop out of sports for every one boy by the end of high school based on the sole reason that they feel it doesn’t make them look “ sexy.” Another study done by the Women’s Sports Foundation (2011) found that twenty-three percent of girls between the ages of eleven and seventeen don’t even attempt to play sports they may be interested in because they believe that it would be “ unfeminine” of them to try.

The media tells young girls that they should be into activities such as fashion design and modeling, putting emphasis on professions that show off their bodies and not their intellects. While modeling and fashion design are perfectly acceptable job professions, the problem lies in the fact that activities such as those are the only ones being portrayed as acceptable in media. Young girls are getting the message that to pursue any typically male dominated activity would be “ unfeminine,” and therefore would make them seem unattractive.

Despite women making up half of the world’s population, we still live in a male dominated culture where women can be portrayed on unrealistic Barbie dolls in the media. This portrayal is having ill effects on the young girls of future generations. Media is playing a progressively larger role in a girl’s body image than ever before, and with the unrealistic images they are shown they begin to be dissatisfied with their own bodies. Young girls begin to worry about being sexy and attractive at ages as young as eight years old,

and worry about being fat as young as three. As a result of their dislike for their own bodies, young girls begin to try and make themselves “ perfect.”

They will starve themselves and work out, almost to an unhealthy extent. Putting this desire to be sexy above their health, some girls even develop eating disorders because of the unrealistic images they compare themselves to. Along with never finding themselves to be beautiful, girls will even deprive themselves of pursuing their interests because they believe them to be “ unfeminine.” The unrealistic portrayal of women in the media needs to put to an end before the situation that young girls are put in gets any more out of hand.