

The truth of the ideal woman



This essay goes into a topic that is unaware to the majority of society. It goes to the roots of how society views women and it reveals the secrets of why women act, look, and think a certain way. This essay explains how the media is forcing women of all ages to conform to one image. It explains how stressful this is to a female and that they will go to great lengths, subconsciously or not, to fulfill the image that the media wants each woman to conform to. This essay goes into examples such as propaganda, the work place, raising children, a woman's assumed role, women's health and even products a woman may buy to uphold the media's image. The media wants women to fulfill this " perfect image," to do this a woman will think of herself differently, treat others differently, and overall this whole " perfect image" causes a chain reaction to our society and the way society views women, thus greatly affecting how women act, think, and look to fit this " perfect image."

Behind the Truth of the Ideal Woman

Media shapes the way females think and act in society. " One study reports that at age thirteen, 53% of American girls are " unhappy with their bodies." This grows to 78% by the time girls reach seventeen."(National Institute, 2010) Physiologically, these young women wish their bodies were different. This drastically increases between ages thirteen to seventeen when a girl is first judged by their appearance. The media is constantly forcing females of all ages to conform to this " perfect woman" image. The media depicts females to have a certain body type, attitude, and it determines a woman's future life goals. The media forces women to think, act and look a certain way.

Women are given specific roles that are determined by the media. A woman's first role is to be a caretaker; this idea is thrust upon us by the media. If a female is acting like a "tom-boy" it is frowned upon by society because of the way media exposes the "perfect woman." This has been escalated ever since the end of World War II. "The popular media (television, movies, magazines, etc.) have, since World War II, increasingly held up a thinner and thinner body image as the ideal for women." (Teen Health and the Media, 2010) The thin body image for women has been reintroduced into society and makes a woman's image all she is and how she will represent her family. At this time physical and social appearances defined who you are and how your family was going to be represented. During WWII women got to have jobs to help their country, but once it ended every woman wanted to be her own provider, which was frowned upon because it was masculine, but, after WWII the "perfect woman" image was born putting pressure on the way society views women and their actions. Society believes that a woman must always be neat, at home, rested, etc. Just the thought of being grungy/dirty or any kind of hard labor was frowned upon and viewed as tom-boy like behavior. In a situation where a woman is successful in the working world we view it as if she cheated to get her way on top. Why, because media influences the way we view woman, even to this day. This causes us to treat men and woman differently because we subconsciously believe what the media is telling us. Subconsciously, we believe that whatever the media says must be true or have some truth to it. We do not care where they got their information we just believe it. It sculpts the way all females think and/or act.

Media portrays woman as caretakers. For centuries woman have always trained their daughters to be like them so they can take care of their own families. As Kuperberg and Stone explain;

" During the past two decades, the media depiction of women in general, while in some ways reflecting the reality of changes in their labor force participation, continues to focus on traditional roles and is increasingly pervaded by an individualistic rhetoric of choice. The media depiction of motherhood remains highly traditional. It is against this backdrop that we explore images about women whose actions signify a return to the traditional family form of male breadwinner-stay-at-home mother."

(Kuperberg, Stone, 2008)

Society views women to have their family as top priority and if anything else gets in the way is must be put aside until their " initial" duty is completed. We have these " cultural universals" that the media forces society to be more sensitive toward woman and to give men " tough love". If a girl fell and scraped her knee, one would aid her and talk to her as if she has no idea what to do; where as, if a boy scraped his knee one would give him " tough love" and tell him to suck it up. This " trains" a girl to be dependant on a provider and makes her learn that if someone needs help she will need to take care of them. We feel this way because the media wants all females to lean towards the traditional choice, to take care of others and to keep the female's role at home. Any other kind of depiction of a female's role is frowned upon.

Mothers want to be good mothers in as many ways possible; one subconscious standard is to raise their children right. This pushes the "stay-at-home" or "traditional" view of a mother. Mothers then give more face time to their daughters to instill the same impression media shows society. By giving daughters more social activity it will stimulate the brain more frequently. If a mother has a baby girl she gives that girl more face-to-face time, if they have a baby boy, subconsciously they get less face-to-face time. This small social action a mother gives their child affects the way they think and act. This affects a girl's brain drastically helping them throughout their life with social/group activities, in school and outside of school, with hands on problems. Boys on the other hand, learn to function on their own and be independent and are better at more seldom activities like math. (Money, 1972)

Women, they say, learn early in life that female accomplishment brings few rewards. In some cases, women cannot be creative because they are discriminated against. In other instances, a woman's creativity may well be blunted by fear of nonconformity, failure or even success itself. Unlike men, Kagan says, women are trained to have strong anxiety about being wrong. (Money, 1972)

John Money is quoting Dr. Kagan, in which, Kagan is explaining how females are discouraged to be on their own and to depend on a provider to help them with their problems, thus showing the lack of creativity and showing how females are trained to follow directions or do as they are told, thus instilling the traditional role as a caretaker and to depend on a provider. Many mothers say that they do not "favor" either sex of their children but

subconsciously they do because they are more social and compassionate with their daughters, they sympathize with them and guide them to be good mothers because as media has shown, a woman's initial role is to be a caretaker.

Studies also find that the messages conveyed in print media aimed at adolescent girls are traditional, emphasizing women's subordination to men, the centrality of heterosexual relationships, and the reinforcement of gender-segregated occupational stereotypes. (Kuperberg, Stone, 2008)

The media is expressing how woman need to be at home helping and to do as their provider says. The media is brainwashing our society, especially our youth, to think that this " stay-at-home" traditional role is the only role for females and that it should be followed as tradition states. The media is convincing our youth to continue this cycle and to carry on in the desired " perfect woman" fashion. The media instills this idea that women are only to be caretakers and to " train" their daughters to do the same and to follow tradition.

The media has suppressed women's voices all around the world. For decades a woman's voice was ignored and never important. The media portrayed the perfect woman as the perfect housewife, nothing more. The media's ideal perfect woman is the 50's-60's domestic housewife, even though the styles have drastically changed over the years the media still stresses how important the stay-at-home mom is and how important a woman's image and/or reputation should be. A woman's role was to take care of the house and family, their opinions never mattered and if they spoke against their

spouse then they were ridiculed and punished for speaking out of term. A perfect housewife would always be neat, organized, nice, thin, and was always cleaning, baking, or perfecting her image to fit the description. A housewife was never sloppy, or overworked. They only spoke when spoken to or if it was appropriate, they never used vulgar or inappropriate language.

This why being a "tom-boy" was frowned upon. Being a tom-boy meant that a girl didn't care about how they looked, acted, and would do reckless and daring things. These tom-boy actions break this perfect image and who ever acted this way would be ridiculed by peers because they did not fit the media's standards. Girls were never allowed to play co-ed sports for a long time or sports that were originally designed for just men, such as basketball, baseball, and flag football. Today it is more widely accepted to be a tom-boy but it is still frowned upon if a girl acts like a boy. Girls are viewed to never roughhouse or to have outbursts because only rough boys do that, and their excuse is "boys will be boys."

Females then found a way around the physical actions to get what they wanted or to express how they felt. The media has forces females to be manipulative to attack others to get what they wanted to preserve their "perfect woman" image. This is where females bullying was always overlooked because it was never physical, it was purely emotional and manipulation. "They [boys] don't care if they got in trouble, but girls don't want anyone to know they got into trouble," Maura said. 'Girls worry about how they are going to look.'"(Simmons, 2003) These girls know that their image is defined by their actions so they fear that if they do get in trouble then their reputation will be ruined. The media puts pressure on these girls

to be perfect and without flaws and if they were caught doing something bad then it would be the end of their perfect image. At this age their perfect image is everything; to lose this would be mortifying. These girls, who are only in middle school, are trapped in a vicious cycle that the media portrays to our society, especially our youth. The media has shaped different looks and attitudes for certain age groups. For example, these girls that Simmons has interviewed are only in middle school. The media wants every young girl to be sugar spice and everything nice. They must act and dress a certain way. For clothing they only have "girly" choices and to be completely covered and modest. Any other kind of clothing, such as "comfy" clothes, is considered "tom-boy" like and frumpy. At this early age other students pick on who ever this girl may be despite her personality because in middle school image is everything. They are pressured to act this way and anything, such as rough housing/bullying, is frowned upon. These girls feel although they cannot express themselves freely and be themselves because the media wanted them to be perfect angels and to fulfill the single perfect image. They will then resort to manipulating others to channel how they feel. This then carries on into their futures in high school and their working careers.

Media labels women in the working world to be devious, untrustworthy and manipulative. The media makes us feel that having women in the working world is a negative impact and that a woman's main job is at home. "Support for the traditional male-breadwinner/female-homemaker division of labor declined; however, "at no time" was a woman's career portrayed as more important to her than marriage and family." (Kuperberg, Stone, 2008)

A woman's working job is never top priority. For a woman to successfully get a promotion before their male competitor, her peers would say that she "cheated to get ahead" meaning that she most likely slept with or manipulated a superior to get higher up in the working world. This is not always true; media only portrays us to think that. A woman works harder than any man does at a job because it is a male ruling society, women are viewed as less valuable or incapable or doing a good job. This drives women to work harder and to become bullies in the workforce to "keep up" with the times and to "stay on top."

"Because women, racing to crash the glass ceiling, are still token females around the office, their behavior might be scrutinized far more than a male's. If a female has faced difficulties in getting to her position of leadership, she may still face doubts about her staying power in a male-dominated world. So, in a somewhat vicious cycle, such a female may return to that emotional manipulation she picked up at age 4: bullying." (Edmonds, 2010)

Women are constantly doing whatever they can to be successful and to continue to be on top, thus resorting to bullying or manipulative actions at times. Media pictures woman to be deceiving or the bad guy in the working world, this is seen in movies and/or T. V. shows which society constantly watches and learns from. A recent movie that depicts the female boss to be an awful person is "The Proposal" starring Sandra Bullock and Ryan Reynolds. Sandra Bullock plays the pushy cut throat boss that everyone steers clear from and Ryan Reynolds plays her hardworking secretary. This movie is exactly how society views women in the working world. They are viewed as the tough competition. If successful, they are feared by their

competitors or employees. In the movie, Bullock's character acts the way she does so that she can stay successful even though the things people say about her are hurtful. She acts like doesn't let it faze her but it truly does. This is what drives her to be so serious, hardworking, and competitive.

Many women in the working world feel as though they should put up this front to be successful. They feel as though they need to manipulate at times and to work twice as hard as men just to stay in the game, let alone trying to be successful. The media makes society view the working woman as a manipulative antagonist in the working world; in reality, the woman is putting up this front to hide her insecurity and to be successful in a working man's world.

One may say that the media does not cause women to think and act a certain way but free will and/or choice is a main contributor to the way women think and act. Media sculpts women in a certain image where choices are limited to one category. For example; the ideal image for an eighteen year old woman is to have the following; bust size: 32 inches, waist: 23 inches, hips: 32 inches. This is the portrayed "hour glass figure" media states for the perfect woman. These women have to pay more money for less clothing. "Younger shoppers, ages 18 to 34, are willing to spend more -- \$60 a pair, on average -- but only one in 10 women say they've shelled out more than \$100 for a pair of jeans."(Kennedy, 2010) Women don't care how much they spend, as long as they fit the image that's all that matters. These women are prepared to spend this kind of money to fit the image the media wants them to fill. The image the media is handing out to our young women, 18 to 34, is skimpy, "sexy" clothing and a "who-cares" attitude. The media

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wants all women of this age group to be sex symbols and to do as they are told, thus preparing them for the "new domestic housewife". To get any type of clothing that is comfortable, not revealing, and cheap does not exist. To achieve the respectable desired look they have to spend more money to look appropriately. With the current economy they need to save as much as possible, thus having them to resort to the image the media wants these women to follow. The media wants our youth to become the trophy wives that it has constructed our image to be. These are the only choices they have to choose from, they are still being labeled and sculpted into whatever image the media wants.

The media affects each age group differently. For example a young girl in middle school is expected to be nice, sweet, smart, tidy, and above all the perfect child. Any other girl who deviates from this path is seen to be destructive by peers and adults. The adults assume that it is "just a phase" that a girl is rough housing and hope that she will go back to the "perfect angel" image. For a high school girl there is more pressure by peers and adults. The young woman is in transition from the perfect angel that the media desires to the promiscuous adult. In high school, every girl wants to be the "it" girl. The "it" girl simply means to be perfect in every way the way the media wants them to be. They want to have that perfect body and the perfect friends and of course the perfect relationship yet, every girl is different physically and emotionally putting even more pressure on these girls to make them into the "perfect woman." "90 percent of those who have eating disorders are women between the ages of 12 and 25." (Teen Health and the Media, 2010) These girls resort to hurting themselves to fit

the media's standards. Can you imagine a twelve year old restricting herself from eating because she is being made fun of because she " dresses like a boy" because she can't fit into the clothes that are " in" or she's just a little over weight? These young women resort to eating disorders to fit the media's standards. They feel as though it is the only way to " fit in" and to be " happy." The media is implanting these thoughts and acts into these young women to fit that on perfect image and to do what ever it takes to get there.

Bottom line is that the " free will" that some may say influences the way women think or act means nothing because the choices they are given is determined by the media itself. These women have no choice but to follow in the cookie cutter image that the media wants them to have. Our society's youth is being forced into one generic style to " prepare" us for the next step, the traditional role of women. It's sad to think that no one seems to notice that the media is brainwashing our youth to conform into these perfect images and to crush any free will that the growing female may want to express.

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