

# Body image

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



For most people in order to feel good they must look good, however for some people looking good doesn't cut it they have to be perfect. In our minds every one of us has an idealized body image which comes from " a mixture of ideas and feeling about one's physical appearance...linked to self esteem and emotional stability" (Maggie 2). Factors that influence ones self-perceptions are the 21st century media, peers, and family basically our main social surroundings.

All these factors influence us whether we know it or now, so it's only natural for girls to look up to super models, film stars, and athletes. Wanting to be just like them, dressing like them, buying what they do and overall looking perfectly flawless just like them. Even though it's important for some occupations to have the perfect body image like models, athletes and movie stars, it's virtually impossible for an average person to have a perfect body image because of psychological issues and physical problems such as anorexia nervosa (AN) and bulimia nervosa (BN).

The Media is responsible for the negative effects on men and women who are influenced by unrealistic images, which include perfect skin, pulp lips, breasts, hips and a slim waist and for men idly, a lean and muscular physique. An individual is exposed to many different types of perfect images once this occurs, he/she starts comparing themselves with these images. In other words this comparison starts a self image process made up in their mind about themselves the " media images and self identity go together... media affects how one sees themselves and in some cases it affects women negatively" (Maggie 54).

If girls don't look similar to what's posted in magazines and up on billboards they aren't incredibly happy with their figure, because according to the media it's not perfect. For this reason women become depressed, stressed and unhappy. Through advertising women are told what they should look like, this image is mostly based on what the majority of men find attractive. During the early post war years in the 1950's and 1960's women were seen as the perfect skilled housewife, who kept everything spotless.

They were encouraged to play the faultless duty even "advertisements portrayed women as decorative, dependent on men and primarily concerned with personal beauty" (Maggie 43). However the range of different identities available to women did expand the idea of women moving into the male world, in a trouser suit working in office buildings. None the less women are still labeled through the media, which clearly tells women how they should be and what's expected of them.

Anne Marie is a psychotherapist who offers counseling for people who suffer from eating disorders; she states "it's true, more teenage girls than ever are affected by compulsion to achieve for themselves a degree of thinness they see every day in models and celebrities" (106). One of the most influential media forms are women's beauty and fashion magazines, women see models, and actors who are less curvaceous and thinner. Studies show three in four teens in the United States are influenced through magazines .

This media representation is wrong due to the fact that it's not a truthful reflection of real lives but a "symbolic account of what is valued and approved of" (Maggie 45). Women try to achieve this media image to feel accepted no matter what the cost. According to what women are exposed to

in media, they learn to reconstruct themselves and adapt into a defect less image. They can fix weight problems through exercise, chemical maintenance like different facial products and plastic surgery “ sometimes without any harm to health, other with devastating consequences” (Maggie 48).

People die every year from plastic surgery, not only can the outcomes of the surgery be fatal. Before plastic surgery when a doctor tells you what the change will look like it’s “ only an educated guess... Until he or she gets into the operating room and sees exactly what there is to work with, there is absolutely no way to know how the final product will look” (Alice 1). So you may be unhappy with the outcome of the surgery, but won’t be able to do anything about it. When we are sold beauty products we are told aging is unacceptable if you want to be peerless, it implies for us to fix this problem but aging is a natural process. Women who undergo cosmetic surgery do gain a boost in their body image, however afterwards they always want to go back and keep fixing up even more. There are those who try to achieve unrealistic expectations and experience depressions or self adjustment problems. So there are downsides to any kind of treatment if there’s too much of it, and the media influences us to go through all these delirious procedures. Equally important as media influence is also one’s cultural influence, the very roots of a person’s life to which they are exposed to even before media it’s family and friends.

Studies show women who suffer from anorexia or bulimia come from “ family environments in which perfection, control and enmeshment are the norms” (Susan 214). So it should come as no surprise, people coming from such a

perfect controlling family influence feel the need to be flawless as well. Furthermore in Western societies slim and slender is associated with happiness and success while being overweight means you lazy and don't have control of your life. Thomas Cash a psychologist for over 35 years believes those who don't fit "to the slender ideal face prejudice throughout their life span" (10).

Usually these prejudices and social comparison can start as early as elementary school, by interacting with your peers one can tell if there overweight or under. From childhood overweight people are seen differently, some children don't interact with overweight peer's cause they think there lazy and inactive. Keeping that in mind there are also those who enjoy the company of overweight people, they consider them friendlier and warmer. However this just confirms one stereotype of fat jolly people.

In 1990 Marika Tiggemann and Esther Rothblum asked a large group of American and Australian college students about there stereotypes on fat and thin men and women. Study showed more negative stereotypes against the overweight people who were seen as more self indulgent and less attractive. These social comparisons have negative effects on people even children are affected by it; their body image affects their self esteem. Girls think they'll be more liked if they are thinner and it's these children who turn out to be the ones with higher weight concerns.

The way friends and peers act can influence a person's life drastically, not feeling socially accepted and trying to fit in leads to depression, loneliness lack of love and comfort. Whether you're influenced by the media, peers or your profession to achieve an untarnished body you must diet and exercise,  
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however too much of anything is bad it can cause physical and psychological problems. On the other hand in order to maintain a perfect body, most people would think it's normal to exercise around the clock 24/7 while eat small portions offood.

They wouldn't see anything wrong with that picture, although this normal exercise can become something more like the result of eating disorders caused by an obsession of losing weight. Around 8 million Americans have an eating disorder, seven million women and one million men, the two most common eating disorders are Anorexia Nervosa (AN) and Bulimia Nervosa (BN) both of which are caused and lead by a strong will to lose a lot of weight. People with AN are always on the go, they have this constant delirious jitter bug inside them keeping them on the move.

There body has “ the physical capacity to tolerate extreme self imposed weight loss” (Jane 894). AN is an example of that, one of the most deadly psychiatric disorders can be started by just simple dieting. An extensive amount of training, self vomiting and a decrease in food consumption are all signs of AN. It's wrong to try and obtain such thinness to where the “ body weight being maintained at below normal level” (Timothy 1388). AN affects woman both psychologically and physically negatively, looking like a girl on a magazine hardly seems worth it for all this trouble.

The psychological problems include depression, constant preoccupation with food and obsessive worry about weight. Constantly checking your weight and never being satisfied with the way you look leaves a lot on your mind to think about. Usually women suffer from this don't have much self confidence at all. Some bad physical results are high blood pressure and decreased

heart rate, and a decrease bone density. As a result of decrease calcium intake, your body cannot produce a normal bone mass.

This problem is not fixable for AN patients, you can't go back and fix it and this loss of bone may lead to osteoporosis. As you can see, the way one sees their self body image is determined on the world around us. A person must not get caught up in an unreal world or size zero's and perfect skin, but open their eyes to the real world of natural beauty. The media should stop putting up edited andphotoshopped images of people, but rather normal people and their natural self.

For instance dove campaign for Real Beauty teaches girls how to be “ media smart...how to distinguish between a “ real” photo and one that's been manipulated” (Jessica 1). Dove has created a fundraiser in which also real women share their stories to educate young girls about self esteem issues and inspire them to not overcome their struggles with body image. This movement has helped girls worldwide and taught them to be proud of the skin they're in, move moments like dove's Real Beauty Campaign should be taken, a little inspiration can go a long way and help millions of people.

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