

BODY IMAGE PART 2: HOW THE MEDIA AFFECTS OUR BODY IMAGE

What do you tell yourself about you? Do you look at yourself in the mirror and think negatively? If so, you may be experiencing negative body image.

How Does Body Image Develop?

Body image develops from messages you tell yourself about your body based on your life experiences. If you have negative thoughts about your body, you will have negative feelings. So where do your negative thoughts about your body come from? They come from comparing yourself to what you see around you. One study showed that 42% of elementary students between first and third grade want to be thinner indicating that, people compare their bodies to others even at that young age.

The Media and Body Image

In today's world, you are constantly exposed to media via television, movies, magazines, newspapers, the internet, and music. These images and concepts influence your perceptions of what is and isn't attractive, and what is and isn't "acceptable." Think about a newscaster you saw on television recently. Was he or she over 50 years old? Were they overweight or bald? Did they have wrinkles? Probably not. How about the latest magazine cover? Did the person have any skin blemishes or flaws? Again, probably not.

Researchers estimate that the average American views more than 1,000 advertisements daily. Advertisers learned long ago that young, thin, attractive people generally sell more products than those people who are older, heavier or are considered "unattractive." So, where does society get the concept of attractiveness? The answer is the media. The average American woman is 5'4" tall and weighs 140 pounds. The average American model is 5'11" tall and weighs 117 pounds. You don't have to look like a model to be healthy and feel good about yourself.

The Illusion of Beauty

The media teaches women that they must be young, thin, have flawless skin and perfect hair. Men must be broad-shouldered, muscular and blemish-free. Many magazines exist only to promote an unhealthy, unobtainable concept of beauty. What many don't know is that models in advertisements don't look like those cover images in real life. The covers are airbrushed and retouched to ensure they are seen in the most flattering way.

Consequences of Exposure to Media

Exposure to media often leads us to believe that we don't measure up and that somehow we are inferior. After all, most everyone you see through the media has a face and/or body that seems to be perfect. We understand it is difficult to prevent outside forces from influencing your personal body image, but we can help.

Changing Your Body Image

- Learn to distinguish between the unrealistic body images you see in the media and the image of a realistic healthy body
- Acknowledge any negative feelings you have about your body and then work to change them through positive self talk
- Wear attractive clothes that fit and give you confidence about how you look
- Focus on your positive attributes and avoid dwelling on what you perceive as flaws

Activity: What Negative Messages Do You Tell Yourself about Your Body?

Replace those messages with positive, realistic messages.

Negative	Positive
Example: "I'm too fat"	Example: "I'm working hard to lose weight"