



Body Image and the Media

Unrealistic standard of beauty

It's no secret that we live in a weight and appearance obsessed culture. Kids today are inundated with images of hollywood stars that project an unrealistic and unattainable standard of beauty. It doesn't help that advertisements touting diet fads and workouts promise young people that they can achieve the "perfect look," and perfect life, if they try.

What does the research say?

We know from the research that appearance-oriented media (like reality TV, celebrity magazines and websites) are immensely popular among young people and can produce and sustain body dissatisfaction in children. Upwards of 70% of adolescent girls say that images in fashion magazines influence their self-image and nearly half say those picture make them want to diet. Young women's self-esteem drops dramatically after only a few minutes of reading these magazines.

Of course, body image isn't just an issue for girls. Young men experience an increase in depression and body dissatisfaction after exposure to ads featuring a muscular male body ideal. In addition, video games increase a drive for muscularity among boys as young as 7.

Media literacy: an antidote to negative body image

The good news is that parents and teachers do make a difference! Elementary school children reported a significant increase in body esteem 2 weeks after a single lesson explaining how media use technology and fantasy to construct unrealistic and unhealthy beauty images. Talk with your kids about the images, slogans, and messages they consume to help counteract unhealthy body images!



Conversation starters

- Do you regularly compare your appearance, weight or shape to what you see in media?
- List all of the things that your body does for you. Are all of these qualities reflected in the media? Why or why not?
- Do the women and men you see in the media have similar body types to the people in your life you admire?
- What sort of strategies do advertisers use to create the "perfect look?" (Hint: airbrush, photoshop etc...)
- Do you feel like your identity and value is based on how you look?



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Fast Facts:

- Watching soap operas and music videos is associated with poorer body image for girls and boys.
- 70% of adolescent girls say that images in fashion magazines influence their self-image and nearly half say those pictures make them want to diet.
- In children's TV, an eighth of animated male characters have unrealistically muscular physiques.