

As a culture, we must understand that perfection is a myth; it does not exist. The society that has shaped us has damaged our ability to feel good about ourselves. Most Americans have lost the capability to love themselves, their bodies in particular. The average person is taught to fear their body rather than embrace it, which makes them assume that something about them is wrong, and must be fixed; insecurities derive from this attitude. The media and the social environment that we are surrounded by sends judgmental messages about our bodies, which later result in lowered self-esteem and eventually lead to extreme insecurities. A huge part of the American economy is about attacking insecurities to gain profit. The media has chosen an “ideal” body type that is practically impossible to achieve. They strictly believe that women should have big boobs, a thin waist, blonde hair, tan skin, and should be young and athletic looking; men should be built, tall, relatively thin and masculine. If someone does not fit this identity, they are considered disgusting and unworthy. Society disrespects and debunks anyone who does not fit the “perfect” body type, when really this “ideal” body that we have learned to fawn over is a product of Photoshop and an unhealthy model. Most people have become blind to the fact that this is a marketing tool, and that what we label as the “perfect body” does not exist.

Society and media is built on idolization of appearance. We have been heavily influenced to believe that our minds are detached from our bodies. People are taught to think of them as two separate identities, when really they are equally important, and both deserve the same amount of care. When people pay too much attention to the media’s idea of perfection, they can forget to take care of their bodies, and can sometimes purposefully abuse them. Striving to be perfect can result in many mental and physical illnesses, such as anorexia and bulimia. Society’s impossible standards have increased the amount of people who suffer from these two destructive illnesses. The majority of people who suffer from mental and physical illnesses related to achieving perfection, are most often the youth of this culture. Girls are taught at such a young age that being pretty leads to a more successful and fruitful life and that perfection equates with happiness.

I grew up afraid of my own body. I was called names because of how thin I was. I was judged by my body, not by my personality, as many people are. People would call me a “twig,” or “anorexic” or “bulimic,” and would make fun of my weight until I was around the age of fourteen. And honestly, it still happens quite frequently, although now it is said in a much more socially acceptable way. I constantly tried to put on weight to avoid the names and jokes about my bony structure, but nothing really seemed to work. People never realized how offensive they were being, because it was “in” to be skinny. I was called these names so often that I actually started to believe them. As I aged, curvy became the new ideal body type. I remember looking up “How to be curvy” on the Internet and after trying all of these tactics, being let down when I looked in the mirror and realized I still had a boy-like figure. I was afraid that people wouldn’t like me because I was so thin. I was afraid that I would never date a boy, because my body was considered small and frail. I felt self-conscious in everything I wore. I was terrified to exist in the body that I was stuck with.

Everybody wants what they can’t have. Society should not be revolved around ONE way to look, because not everyone fits that image. In fact, every single body is entirely different. It’s nearly impossible to look like that girl or guy we all see in the magazines who has the “perfect” body because we are all built differently. I still struggle with my body image, as most teenage girls do, but I refuse to be afraid of it for the rest of my life. This is a fear everyone is capable of overcoming, that is once we come to the realization that there is no such thing as perfection. We must learn that those ads we often see, that show the blonde girl with big boobs and a thin waist,

or the tough looking man with a six pack, are nothing but marketing tools that have the capability to manipulate the population into thinking we aren't good enough, when really, each of us are perfect just the way we are.

Photos of women and their body parts are everywhere. Their bodies are used to sell everything from makeup to beer. The actresses and models in these advertisements have been getting thinner throughout the years, and have become entirely fake in comparison to the shape and size of the average woman. Magazines are full of articles that urge women to go on diets and develop gym schedules, and ultimately, to lose as much weight as possible in order to achieve the model's body shape on the front cover. These magazines are simply saying that if you lose a few pounds, you will "have it all." You will have the perfect sex life, the perfect house, the perfect job, the perfect everything; you will be completely flawless. But the truth is, that the body image they are projecting is nearly impossible to achieve, and even if you did look just like the model on the front page, your life would still be imperfect. So why does the media advertise a body that is impossible to accomplish? According to the article "Body Image - Girls" on mediasmarts.com this impossible body image is being presented to females because of economic reasons. "By presenting a physical ideal that is difficult to achieve and maintain, the cosmetic and diet industries are assured continual growth and profits." Makeup companies are thriving because of the definition of beauty, in this day and age. These companies pinpoint women's weaknesses and label them as "bad." Commercials claim that if you own this particular foundation, your skin will be flawless. A woman who is self conscious about her skin might see a commercial like this and buy the product thinking it will make her more beautiful. According to Tamara Anderson, author of "Why We Struggle With Beauty And Body Image," "The whole beauty industry is built on, 'You're not OK the way you are. We'll make you better.'" Makeup companies aren't the only ones targeting our insecurities. Many dietary pill commercials simply say in their ad campaign that "Body fat is unattractive, and extremely hard to get rid of, but this pill is clinically proven to help you lose pure body fat." The diet industry brings in 60 billion dollars a year selling their products and approximately 80% of their dieters gain their weight back. The media fuels satisfaction in order to gain business. This affects every age group starting at the age of three. A study has shown that three year olds are already choosing video games that have thin characters as opposed to games that have heavier ones. Seven year olds can already target what they want to change about their bodies, and half of 9 to 12 year olds say they want to be thinner and are already dieting. Half of girls ages 16 to 21 said they would have plastic surgery to improve their body image (Body Image- Girls). It is a problem that is affecting all age groups, but mostly younger generations. If women grow up feeling this way about their bodies, it is likely that their children will feel the same. Some women believe that girls are the only ones facing issues with body image. Deborah Cruz, author of the article "Double Standards: Men are Judged on their Merit While Women on the Size of their Asses," believes that women are the only ones struggling with the popular body image of perfection. She claims that "The world has two standards- women are treated like property and men are treated like they can do no wrong. No matter what a man looks like- fat, skinny, tall, short, brown, yellow or green, he isn't judged by what he looks like." But women aren't the only ones who struggle with their body image; males do as well. This isn't widely recognized because men are much less likely to talk about their insecurities than women are.

Eating disorders are on the rise, for boys as well, especially boys involved in athletics. They are often told by their coaches to lose some weight by exercising and replacing fat with muscle mass. What these coaches often forget, is how challenging it is for some young men to

achieve this. It is more difficult for some boys to lose weight than it is for others because of the way they are genetically built. Unfortunately, it is becoming more and more popular to be thin, not just among females but also among boys. The number of men being treated for anorexia has gone up 67% in the past 5 years (The Media Told Me I'm Fat...). According to societal norms, males not only have to be thin, but must be muscular as well, which is a practically impossible medium to achieve. Some boys develop an obsession with exercise and can become involved in many unhealthy drugs such as anabolic steroids and other performance enhancing drugs. Abusing these substances can lead to damage of the heart, liver, kidneys, and immune system. The problem with this obsession of having the perfect body among boys is that it is challenging to help them because most of the time they don't like to talk about it due to the attitude they have around their image which is being "masculine" and "feelingless." It's clear that obsession with achieving what media calls the "ideal" body, is extremely relevant and harmful, but where exactly does it come from and where do we see it most?

The most popular source for media abuse of body image is in advertisements and magazines. Most teenagers, and some adult women, rely heavily on magazines for information on fashion and on beauty. They go to magazines and ads to see what is "in" in the fashion and beauty world. What people don't realize when they go to these sources for help, is that they are being highly manipulated and persuaded to fit the popular body type. Fashion magazines have a dramatic effect on how we see ourselves and what we think other women and men should look like. Research has shown that teen girls value a magazine's advice on body imagery just as much as they value their peers advice. Women's ideal bodies have been getting thinner and thinner because size 00 models are the people on the front cover. Twenty years ago the average model weighed 8% less than the the average woman. Today is it 23% less (Body Images- advertizing and magazines). Women seem to think that the models we see on the covers of magazines like *Vogue* or *Cosmopolitan*, have perfect lives. This is what the media wants them to believe. Most models strive for perfection; in fact, they are more obsessed with it than the rest of us. In some circumstances they are often pushed to the point of starvation in order to make the magazine and advertising editors happy with their image; what they don't know is that they are never truly satisfied.

A 22 year old model by the name of Luisel Ramos died one month before the 2006 Madrid Fashion Show from heart failure because of anorexia nervosa. She had spent the last 3 months eating nothing but lettuce leaves and diet coke. Three months later, her 18 year old sister was found dead from malnutrition. Models strive to be the thinnest they can possibly be and they commonly suffer from eating disorders. Concha Guerra told BBC News that "Fashion is a mirror and many teenagers imitate what they see on the catwalk." But Fashion magazines and advertisements aren't the only places in which the media portrays this idea of perfection.

Conceptual, fake beauty that we label "perfection" can be seen on the Internet, in video games, through music lyrics and music videos, TV and films, as well as in the figures of toys. Digital media has become an enormous part of our lives and is especially important to the lives of children and teenagers. Other media, such as music and movies, can be consumed through the Internet, as well. The Internet includes social networks which allow us to post our own content, and people normally end up posting about themselves, including photos of themselves. There are apps, and programs, such as Photoshop that allow people to manipulate their own figures and faces to resemble society's idea of perfection, and then add these photos to social media. Yet people still have a negative attitude towards their body image. Video games have characters with unrealistic body shapes for both females and males. The majority of women in video games are

sexualized and have barbie-like proportions. This is very common in music as well. According to the article "Body Image-Music" on mediasmarts.com, "Music is a significant medium in a young person's life, particularly during the teenage years. While other media may occupy a greater number of hours, it is most often from music that teenagers define their identities and draw cues about how to dress and behave." When women see their favorite musicians being sexualized in music videos, they feel like they have to act the same way. Most of the time mainstream musicians are often thin, attractive looking and extremely sexualized. It's rare to find a successful musician that doesn't fit this standard. And when they don't fit this standard they are harshly judged. For example, Christina Aguilera's weight gain when she began to age more, was thought of as "a travesty" by magazines and tabloids, when really it was just a natural development she went through when she transitioned from a teenager to an adult. Music is known to influence teenagers who have the ability to understand the lyrics, but what influences children?

Toys are the first media that children are exposed to. The messages that kids receive about body image from toys occur at a time when they are still developing ideas about gender identity. Barbie dolls are an extremely popular toys and most parents see no harm in giving their daughter one; they can cause body dissatisfaction and irrational body expectations at an extremely young age. According to one of the managers who help control the Barbie Doll company, 99% of girls from the ages 3 to 10 years of age own at least one Barbie. No wonder why so many girls grow up being uncomfortable in their own skin; they have false expectations.

Young women grow up surrounded by expectations of what they are supposed to look like. They learn what "perfect" means at a very young age. Many girls grow up wanting to be super thin, but can't because that is not how they are built. They are surrounded by this unrealistic idea of the perfect body. They see it on billboards on the way to school, they see it when flipping through magazines in a doctor's office, some even see their own mother's obsession with her own body image. Through all of this brainwashing, they learn what it means to be "pretty" and "flawless" in this flawed society. If young girls become obsessed with this idea that being bone thin equals perfection, they become more susceptible to developing eating disorders which is extremely detrimental to anyone's health, let alone young women when their bodies are still developing. Because there is no such thing as the "ideal" body, and because young girls are so obsessed with having one, three key problems occur: eating disorders, mental depression, and physical depression. Amanda Von Schlegal, explains in her article "How the Media Affects the Self Esteem and Body of Young Girls," just how scary this can be: "Calories. A word most typical, young girls fear. The media is always soliciting a new form of a pill or company to jump on board with, to lose weight; showing gorgeous, tan, cardboard abs, perfect figured girls next to the ad."



example of the “perfect” body that the media portrays.

Because of ads like this, that intimidate young women and convince them to lose weight, national rates of eating disorders have dramatically increased. According to Von Schlegel, bulimia in women between the ages of 10 and 39 has more than tripled, and that data was received more than 9 years ago. What is it like now?

Anorexia Nervosa And Bulimia Nervosa are both serious mental and physical illnesses that many women suffer from on an extreme level due to the media’s pressure to be perfect. Anorexia Nervosa is an eating disorder that is characterized by abnormally low body weight, fear of weight gain, and distorted weight perception. People who suffer from anorexia restrict the amount of food they eat, exercise constantly to lose calories, and pay a large amount of attention to their calorie intake. No matter how much weight an anorexic loses, they always fear of gaining it back and will do anything to avoid it. According to the Mayo Clinic “Anorexia isn’t really about food. It’s an unhealthy way to try and cope with emotional problems. When you have anorexia, you often equate thinness with self worth.” Some of the physical symptoms are extreme weight loss, fatigue, insomnia, dehydration, low blood pressure, and an excess amount of small, soft hair growing throughout the body. Some of the mental symptoms are: preoccupation with food, denial of hunger, irritability, depression and suicidal thoughts. Possible factors that can increase one’s ability to have anorexia include: being female, being of a young age (teens are more susceptible because of changes in their bodies and extreme peer pressure), and participating in sports, or work involved with artistic activities such as acting, athletics, or modeling. Bulimia Nervosa is closely related to Anorexia in the way that they share similar symptoms and are both life threatening disorders. Bulimia is when someone purges and then throws up excessively or they excessively exercise to try and get rid of calories. Both of these illnesses have the ability to take over a person’s life, and most of the time, the people who have it don’t want treatment.

Unfortunately, we let the media control us with its idea of the perfect body. We let them attack us constantly and allow them to give us insecurities. According to Merriam Webster, insecurity means “uncertainty or anxiety about oneself; lack of confidence.” Confidence depends

on being able to deal with adversity, one's sense of comfort and knowing that they are able to get what they need. Confidence is security and lack of confidence is insecurity. We must diminish our insecurities and stop being victims of society's impossible standards. Your insecurities are all internal, which means maybe you can't change them, but you can most definitely change the way you think of them. Once people know the truth behind the media's representation of the body and why it is presented inaccurately, they can learn to love and embrace their insecurities. We must reinforce the definition of beauty and make it something that we can all achieve.

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