

## How the Media Portrays Women

The pressure on women to look and behave in certain ways is deeply ingrained into our culture. It is often easy to overlook the impact that culture has on how we feel about ourselves and our bodies.

Watching TV, reading magazines, newspapers, or surfing the internet it is all we see are airbrushed images of perfect bodies of women. Images of female bodies are everywhere. Women and their body parts sell everything from food to cars. As humans we absorb the relentless message that beauty is the norm. Why are the standards of beauty being imposed on women? The answer is economics.

To maintain diet and cosmetic profits, Industries use an ideal person that is unachievable to society to maintain profits. Women who are insecure about their bodies are more likely to buy beauty products, new clothes, and diet aids. The diet industry alone is worth between 40 and 100 billion a year selling products. The number one “magic wish”, of girls between the ages of 10-14 is to lose weight. In a recent study 10,000 girls aged 8-12, 17% induced vomiting or used laxatives or diet pills to lose weight. By the time girls reach adolescence, eating disorders are the third most common illness afflicting them.

Researchers report that women’s magazines have ten and one-half times more ads and articles promoting weight loss than men’s magazines. Television and movies reinforce the importance of a thin body as a measure of a women’s worth. In recent reports over three-quarters of female characters in TV are underweight, and only one in twenty are above average in size. Heavier actresses tend to receive negative comments from male characters about their bodies.

Research indicates that exposure to images of thin, young, air-brushed female bodies can be linked to depression, loss of self-esteem and the development of unhealthy eating habits in women and girls. Twenty years ago the average model weighed 8 percent less than the average woman, but today’s models weight is 23 percent less than the average women. The messages that the media sends to women about thinness, dieting, and beauty tells “ordinary” women that they are always in need of adjustment, and that the female body is an object to be perfected.

Emotional abuse is any behavior that is designed to control human beings through the use of fear, humiliation, intimidation, guilt, coercion, or manipulation. Emotional abuse is any kind of abuse that is emotional rather than physical in nature. It can include verbal abuse, constant criticism, put-downs, and constant disapproval.

Many abusers will use these tactics against their victim to make them feel ashamed and worthless to try and make them believe that no one else would want them or ever love them. Abusers may use these tactics along with physical abuse to control their victims. Verbal assaults can include belittling, criticizing, name calling, screaming, sarcasm and humiliation. Over time these types of assaults can erode your sense of self -confidence and self-worth.

Because society places such high regards to beauty it is important people learn to love and care for themselves to increase self-esteem. Having a higher self-esteem can produce healthier relationships. If you think that you are in an unhealthy relationship contact the DOVE program for more information. 1-877-830-DOVE

“It is unreasonable to expect that people will change their behavior easily when so many forces in the social, cultural, and physical environment conspire against such change”. Institute of Medicine.

## To Be Your Best Self

- To change your world, you must change yourself.
- To blame and complain will only make matters worse.
- Whatever you see in others shows you yourself.
- See the best in others, and you will be your best.
- Give to others, and you give to yourself.
- Appreciate beauty, and you will be beautiful.
- Admire creativity, and you will be creative.
- Love and you will be loved.
- Seek to understand, and you will be understood.
- Listen and your voice will be heard.
- Teach, and you will learn.
- Show your best face to the mirror, and you'll be happy with the face looking back at you.

Resources: [http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/issues/stereotyping/women\\_and\\_girls/women\\_be](http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/issues/stereotyping/women_and_girls/women_be)  
<http://www.ourbodiesourselves.org/book/companion.asp?id=&compID=7>

For more information on Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault or Stalking call DOVE 1-877-830-DOVE