

# the media: how does it influence us?



Do you sometimes look in the mirror and not like what you see? You aren't alone in this. And sometimes your body *hasn't actually changed*, just your perception of it has. We all have days when we feel awkward or uncomfortable in our bodies. We feel the pressure to measure up to the way fashion models look in the pages of magazines, or the way actors and actresses look in the movies, on television, or on the Internet. Artists in music videos give us images of beauty and a lifestyle that most of us can only dream about. Or we admire the way a famous athlete looks and wish our own bodies could look that way. Celebrities always seem so happy and popular and rich in the images we see, *but being media literate means we understand that these images don't tell the whole story.*

Media images and the fashion and diet industries create and perpetuate social and cultural definitions of beauty and attractiveness. They provide the context in which we learn to place so much value on appearance and on the size and shape of our bodies. Mostly, larger people are portrayed negatively. Their weight is the focus of the role, and they are either being laughed at or rejected. Thin people get to be portrayed in a wide range of roles and images, with no negative focus on weight.

Media messaging and advertising have strongly influenced how we define what is attractive and beautiful and its powerful effect on self-esteem and body image is acknowledged as a contributing factor in the development of disordered eating.

We are constantly bombarded with air-brushed, photo-shopped images of models and celebrities. These images promote a 'thin ideal' that isn't real in the first place, and is impossible to achieve and maintain with good health. The cosmetic and diet industries make billions of dollars from the body image insecurities they have helped to create!

It is no accident that the definition of beauty these companies promote centre on thin, half-dressed youthfulness. The message we get loud and clear is that that in order to be beautiful, you can never be too thin, and that wrinkles and aging are a fate to be avoided. And it's not just girls and women who are influenced by these images. As men's magazines become more popular, there is an increase in boys and men wanting to look like the images of well-built guys with impressive biceps and chiseled, washboard abs that they see in advertising and entertainment. *Media literacy* means understanding that these images are unattainable - that they are false in the first place. They are airbrushed and the body proportions are often redrawn. The models who posed for the pictures don't actually look like the finished product. For a great example of this, check out the 'Dove Evolution of Beauty' video that shows a model from beginning makeup to finished 'product'.

## How Do I Know...

### If Advertising and the Media Influence How I See Myself?

- Ads can influence you feeling dissatisfied or depressed about your body and weight.
- Your beauty role-models are fashion models or celebrities.
- You read and believe magazine articles that tell you that 'perfect' body is just a diet away.

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## Where do I find out more?

**Jessie's Legacy** a program of **Family Services of the North Shore** provides web based eating disorders prevention resources to support BC youth, families, educators and professionals. Family Services of the North Shore is one of the 7 BC Partners for Mental Health and Addictions Information.

Visit [www.jessieslegacy.com](http://www.jessieslegacy.com) or [www.heretohelp.bc.ca](http://www.heretohelp.bc.ca)

As consumers we can reject these made-up media images and messages that are sold to us. If we think critically and really evaluate the advertising and images we see, we can understand clearly how they help to create body dissatisfaction and self-doubt. If we then refuse to accept the 'suggested sell' in a way that affects industry profits, we will be helping to create new, more realistic standards of beauty and identity that will contribute to us living healthier lives.

## What Can I Do?

- 1) Remind yourself that the print ads you see in magazines are all photographed with special lighting and then digitally retouched and enhanced. When we spend money trying to make ourselves look like their unrealistic images, they keep on making money!
- 2) Question the motives of these companies and their advertisers, and make sure the hard-earned money you spend reflects the person you are, not the person that the media and advertisers want you to be.
- 3) Be a role-model to yourself and others. Develop your own style and celebrate who you are. Break free from the restrictive ways media and advertising say we should look.
- 4) Become a critical consumer of advertising and media messages.
- 5) Voice your opinion and protest the negative images and messages you see by writing letters to advertisers, television stations and movie studios.
- 6) Encourage media and advertising to present more diverse images of people, images that promote positive and realistic messages of beauty, health and self-esteem.
- 7) Remember that the primary goal of the fashion, cosmetic, diet, fitness, and plastic surgery industries is to make money, not to help you to 'reach your fullest potential' and 'be the best person that you can possibly be'. If they *actually* did that, you would no longer need to buy their products!

♥ **Counselling**

♥ **Support**

♥ **Education**

Family Services of the North Shore is an accredited not-for-profit community-based agency that offers education, support and counselling services. We also lead the provincial work in eating disorders prevention. Family Services of the North Shore has been caring for the community for over 60 years. Our high-profile, proactive presence throughout the province connects the community through a variety of programs that create an environment for all families and individuals to thrive.

We recognize the continuing contribution of the City of North Vancouver, District of North Vancouver, District of West Vancouver, and the financial assistance of the Province of British Columbia.



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