

# Media and Body Image

## Exposure to Media and Advertising

It is hard to quantify our exposure to media and advertising – we are constantly bombarded daily with media messages through a huge variety of formats including TV, social media, apps, radio, magazines, newspapers, and product advertising through influencers and celebrities.

## Media and Body Image

There is a great deal of evidence that what we see and hear in the media influences the way we think and feel about ourselves. The images we see in media do not represent the true reality and diversity of society, often exclusively focusing on current beauty ideals based on current trends. The 'ideal' body has changed drastically over time and differs between cultures, ages, and genders. Currently, in western culture, the ideal female body glorifies thinness and femininity while the ideal male body tends to emphasise the importance of muscle mass and height.

## Editing

It is no secret that many images we see in media are digitally manipulated, especially with the use of editing software, filters and AI. Often images are "edited" to enhance a person's image or remove 'flaws' and can be done so well you may not even notice. This altering creates an image that is unrealistic, unattainable, and pushes the distance between what is shown and what is reality. For further information, there are some great online resources such as: <http://mediasmarts.ca/digital-media-literacy/media-issues/body-image> OR <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iYhCn0jf46U>



## Comparisons with Others

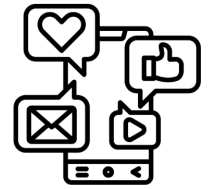
It can be dangerous to compare ourselves to the images we see. Very few people have bodies that naturally match up with the 'ideal body' pushed in the media—even the person shown in the image does not look like that in real life!

As a result, many people can feel negatively towards their body and may see themselves as 'not good enough' or 'unattractive'. They may try to change their body or struggle with their self esteem as a

result of comparing themselves to body ideals.

## Social Media

Exposure and interpretation of social media can have a significant effect on body image and self-esteem. Social media gives us a carefully curated snapshot of a person's life. It often shows selected content of that person's body, meal or life to show the user in the most positive and enviable light. People can dedicate significant time and effort into the styling, filtering, and editing of content and of course, only tend to share the images that they feel good about! It is important to remember it is not the complete picture you are seeing.



## Advertising

The purpose of advertising is to persuade people to buy a product or service. If people can be influenced to feel dissatisfied with who they are or what they have, advertisers can offer their product as a 'solution'. This 'solution' advertised may be physical like clothing, or it may be an experience or emotion such as confidence or happiness.

## What is Media Literacy?

Media literacy refers to thinking critically about the media we are exposed to. It involves taking a step back, analysing and evaluating media with a spirit of scepticism and inquiry. This can include asking questions such as:

- Who created this message?
- Who paid for it?
- What is the purpose of this message?
- Who is the target audience?
- Who might benefit from this message?
- Who might be harmed by this message?
- Is this fact or opinion? How credible is this?
- What are the sources of this information?
- In what ways has this image been edited? (e.g. lighting, makeup, camera angles, digital alterations)
- What body shapes are shown more positively or negatively than others? Why is this?
- What body shapes are not shown at all? And why?
- Do I agree with the values in this message?



By becoming more objective and critical about the media messages we are exposed to we are in a better position to decide how much we want to believe these messages.