

The Media And Self-Esteem

It is hard to escape mass media these days. Images and messages bombard us from the Internet, television, magazines, newspapers, radio, bill-boards. Societal messages can come from the government and education sectors, as well as more explicit industries such as beauty, health and fitness.

Advertisers have worked hard to create images that make us feel as if we are lacking somehow, so that we want to buy their products. It is not just ideas about looks that we get from society. We also infer how our personalities, talents and achievements "should" be.

The media conveys messages that overtly or subliminally manage to get into our heads. How often have you picked up a magazine and compared yourself to the person on the cover? Have there ever been times you wished you look like a person you've seen in a film? What are the soap operas on TV that you watch regularly? Think about the themes and morals that you take away from film and television programs.



The banner features the Explorable logo at the top center, with the text "EXPLORABLE" in a large, white, sans-serif font and "Quiz Time!" in a white, cursive font below it. Below the logo are three square images, each with a white border and a white caption underneath. The first image shows a pair of red roller skates on a wooden deck, with the caption "Quiz: Psychology 101 Part 2". The second image shows a fan of colorful pens, with the caption "Quiz: Psychology 101 Part 2". The third image shows a Ferris wheel at sunset, with the caption "Quiz: Flags in Europe". To the right of the three images is a white arrow pointing right with the text "See all quizzes =>".

Reality vs. Media

Reality TV shows blur the lines between what we think should happen in real life and what actually happens. It is important to remember that the people we see in the media don't wake up looking like they do on the television. Consider this short video from a wider self-esteem project launched by Dove.

The media readily invites self-talk such as: "I wish I were as beautiful/tall/clever/skinny as _____." It is possible to become obsessed with celebrities and try to imitate them. Comparing ourselves to other people is never very helpful, especially when the objects of

comparison have staff to help them look the way they do.

Social Media and Your Self-Esteem

Social media can have diverse effects on a person's self-esteem. Think about Facebook or Twitter. Perhaps you know somebody who constantly posts about themselves in order for others to press like, which makes them feel validated and appreciated. However, if somebody doesn't respond in the way that they hope for, they might start to feel anxious and even a bit paranoid.

Social media can allow us to stay firmly within our comfort zones. We can watch the world go by from a screen. Consider the irony of a social network, where it is possible to socialize without actually spending much physical time with someone.

In Japan, virtual realities allow men to have girlfriends, without the hassle and heartbreak of actually having a girlfriend (you can read more about it [here](#) [1]). This probably doesn't do the self-esteem of men or women there much good in the long run!

Both Genders Are Affected

Many studies of social media and self-esteem focus on females. However, males are also susceptible to the messages from society.

Take the case of a fictional character, named Andrew. He is 16, skinny, wears glasses, has acne and is good at languages. Athletics and sports don't interest him much. Some people assume he is gay because he is not interested in typical teenage boy activities.

Quietly he worries that he does not match up to what a typical man 'should' look like, according to the programs he watches on TV. He went through a phase of trying to eat as much as possible in an attempt to gain weight, but this only led to him feeling terrible. In the end, he decided to embrace who he was, rather than lament what he wasn't.

Another way the media can be detrimental to self-esteem is because its emphasis on external factors, such as appearance and wealth. Our core worth is something more stable and enduring than these external factors.

Call to Action : How Does Media Impact Your Life?

Reflect on how societal messages make you feel by recording your responses to social media. Draw yourself a table like the following, and spend time over the next week to fill it out. If you notice that media is having a negative impact on your life, can you remove yourself from some of it?

Source	What caught your attention?	What did it make you think?	How did it make you feel?	Can you think of an alternative response?
Facebook				

Adverts on TV				
Adverts on the Internet				
Magazines / Newspapers				
TV Programs				
Films				
Instagram				
Twitter				
Other (e.g. Pinterest)				

Key Points

- We are bombarded by societal messages in our everyday lives.
- The media can cause us to make comparisons to others, and for us to say 'should' a lot, which can be detrimental to our self-esteem.
- Social media can be a mixed blessing because it allows us to connect to others, but it can become a trap for self-validation.

Source URL: <https://explorable.com/e/media-and-self-esteem>

Links:

[1] <http://time.com/3998563/virtual-love-japan/>, [2] <https://explorable.com/users/kimlyon>, [3] <https://explorable.com/e/media-and-self-esteem>