



Published on *Go Ask Alice!* (<https://goaskalice.columbia.edu>)

[Home](#) > Media and body image

Media and body image ^[1]

Dear Alice,

I am 21 years old and increasingly, the way women are portrayed on TV, movies, in magazines, ads, etc. depresses me. I've given up cable and all magazine subscriptions. The endless images of rail-thin girls with huge breasts, taut bellies, toned thighs, tight butts, four-inch heels, long flowing hair, etc., makes me feel so inadequate. I'm sure all girls feel pressure sometimes, but it's so bad that as soon as I see something of this nature I HATE myself. I start to question my value. I start to doubt how the people closest to me view me. I feel like the entire world is against me. For instance, I went to see a movie with my boyfriend and when three of the actresses ended up prancing around naked, I was immediately insecure and upset. I left the theater, crying. I can't avoid pop culture entirely, and I don't know what to do.

Please help!

Answer

Dear Reader,

As you touched upon, pressures to look or act a certain way plague most people at some point in their lives. With seven out of ten women, according to one study, reporting that they feel more depressed and angry after viewing media images like those you described, you're certainly not alone. What is positive about your experience is that you recognize what triggers your feelings and are proactively lessening your exposure to them (i.e., images of women on TV and magazines). Of course, it is very difficult to altogether escape these "endless images," unrealistic ideals of beauty, and sexualization of females (as well as hypermasculinization of males). Outside of the media, you mentioned these ideals and expectations are reinforced by other social institutions and those around us. In order to address your insecurities, focus more of that can-do attitude you already have on replacing negative influences with stimuli that encourage you to celebrate your wonderful, unique features.

You're taking a great first step by simply acknowledging that this outside pressure is making you feel crummy. By recognizing how you react to these images and rechanneling that frustration, you have the power to do more than you may imagine. If it's your style, join a group or start a petition that aims to address these unrealistic portrayals of women in the media. There are

certainly others around you who have or do feel similar. Check out campus groups if you're a student or activism communities online or in your local area to join forces with others who share in your frustration. [About-Face](#) [2], a non-profit organization that aims to help cultivate positive body image and take action against harmful media messages, is a great place to start getting ideas.

On a more informal level try the following to help turn your feelings of self-hate into self-love:

- List what you like about your body (Do you have curves that won't stop? Are you blessed with luscious locks?), post affirmations around your home and enlist friends and family to add to the collection. Surrounding yourself with positive messages may help counter the negative images you see in the media.
- Recognize the beauty in your talents and passions! There is a reason the adage "beauty is only skin deep" is so widely used. Are you a great cook? Do you pick up new languages super fast? Instead of being your own worst critic, become your own external and internal stylist and regain control over how the world and those closest to you see your beauty and worth.
- Searching online or in stores, leverage your frustrations with the media into finding clothes and accessories that highlight the features you want to celebrate about yourself.
- Even the people you see on TV, in movies, and in magazines probably have insecurities themselves but most of them have stylists, personal trainers, and other people constantly helping them look their best. Check out some of the Related Q&As to learn more about how to become your own stylist and personal trainer.

As much as you repeat these self-love exercises, there will likely be moments where you still feel upset by images in the media. Even without the media, interactions at work, at school, or with friends and family may reinforce these insecurities. When these occur, take a few deep breaths and try to remind yourself what you love about yourself. There is no such thing as "normal" when it comes to beauty. Perfect, flawed, large, small — these descriptors are all relative. Keeping this in mind, do you notice that you're getting negative messaging from those around you? Surrounding yourself with people that celebrate you for all your unique attributes (and taking a break from those who don't) may help you do the same for yourself.

Theories abound about why and how the media affects people's self-image, but with a little practice and the help of your can-do attitude, hopefully you will be able to see your own unique beauty and share it with the world and those closest to you. And remember, it's okay to reach out for help like you're doing; you're not alone in feeling these pressures. If you continue to feel upset by these images in the media, consider attending body image support groups. Local counseling centers may offer opportunities to get together with others who share similar concerns. Remember, beauty is measured by the life you lead, not how similar you look to this "A list" movie star or that centerfold model. Everybody and every body is beautiful and worthy.

Alice!

Category:

[Nutrition & Physical Activity](#) [3]

[Body Image](#) [4]

Related questions

[Body mass index \(BMI\) and the right weight for my height?](#) [5]

[What to eat?](#) [6]

[Struggling with low self-esteem](#) [7]

[Kickstart for getting healthy eating and exercise plan in gear?](#) [8]

Resources

[Counseling and Psychological Services \(CPS\) \(Morningside\)](#) [9]

[Mental Health Services \(CUIMC\)](#) [10]

Published date:

Jun 17, 2011

Last reviewed on:

Feb 26, 2015

Footer menu

- ▼ [Contact Alice!](#)
 - [Content Use](#)
 - [Media Inquiries](#)
 - [Comments & Corrections](#)
- ▼ [Syndication & Licensing](#)
 - [Licensing Q&As](#)
 - [Get Alice! on Your Website](#)
 - [Full Site Syndication](#)
 - [Link to Go Ask Alice!](#)

Go Ask Alice! is not an emergency or instant response service.

If you are in an urgent situation, please [visit our Emergency page](#) to view a list of 24 hour support services and hotlines.

Source URL: <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/media-and-body-image>

Links

[1] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/media-and-body-image>

[2] <http://www.about-face.org/>

[3] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/nutrition-physical-activity>

[4] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/body-image>

[5] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/body-mass-index-bmi-and-right-weight-my-height>

[6] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/what-eat>

[7] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/struggling-low-self-esteem>

[8] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/kickstart-getting-healthy-eating-and-exercise-plan->

gear

[9] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/resource/counseling-and-psychological-services-cps-morningside>

[10] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/resource/mental-health-services-cuimc>