

## TEENS

## Speak Out

**Body Image and the Media**

**I**t's no secret that the average person you see on the street doesn't look like a model in a magazine. The average fashion model is 7 inches taller than the average American woman, yet weighs 23 pounds less. Men in the media also have a typical look: broad-shouldered, narrow-waisted, muscle-clad, and free of body hair. That's far from the look of the average American male.

Some people think the bodies we see in the media are unrealistic and harmful. Others think they represent a healthful ideal. Take a look at what these teens have to say, and then decide how you feel.



## Problems with Images in the Media

The “ideal body” presented in the media is exceptionally thin. A typical female fashion model has a body mass index of 16.8—thinner than 98 percent of all women in America, and thin enough to put her health at risk. These media images may be making teen girls dissatisfied with their own appearance. More than half of all teen girls and women say they are unhappy with their bodies. Increasing numbers of males are also unhappy with their body image.

“Looking at magazines and seeing how perfect everyone’s body is makes me feel like my body isn’t good enough. When I look around, though, I see that I look pretty much like everyone else.”

—Ned R., age 16



## Benefits of Images in the Media

In the United States today, 66 percent of adults and 17 percent of teens are overweight. Over 30 percent of adults are considered obese. Health problems related to being overweight include type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Using models who look more like the typical American could give the impression that being overweight is normal and that it doesn’t pose a health risk.

“When I read magazines, I don’t want to see people who look average. Media personalities are people to look up to—an ideal. With the obesity problem in America, media images that only show the average American may set an unhealthy example.”

—Joanna L., age 16

### Activity

## Beyond the Classroom

- 1. Investigate** images from a variety of different media, such as magazines, billboards, and television. Take notes on the type of males and females that are pictured.
- 2. Survey** other teens to find out how they feel about this issue. Ask: Do you think the bodies you see in the media are healthy? Do they make you feel good or bad about yourself?
- 3. Express** your views on this topic. Write a newspaper column summarizing what you’ve learned from other teens about the effect of media images on body image.

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For more information about body image and the media, use this code at [glencoe.com](http://glencoe.com).