

“Ideal Not Real” Body Image Activity

Goal:

- To demonstrate how “ideal” bodies in the media set unrealistic standards.

Have Ready:

- Two large pieces of flipchart paper and markers.
- Body Image Action Planning brainstorm activity, optional but highly recommended.
- Body Image Booster for each participant.

Instructions:

- Divide the class into two groups. Have one group draw the “ideal” or “perfect” male body while the other group draws the “ideal” or “perfect” female body. Have the youth draw the gender they relate to the most, i.e. boys draw the male and the girls draw the female.
- Ask youth, **“What does the media tell us the “ideal” female / male body should look like?”** Tell them to have as much fun as possible with their drawing, but that it is not supposed to be what they personally find most attractive. Stress that this is not about art - the more cartoonish, the better.
- Have them choose one or two people to present their drawing to the group. The drawings will most likely have some of the following:

Girls

Lots of makeup, thin, big breasts and butt, white teeth, jewelry, blond hair, white skin etc.

Guys

No body hair, tanned (if white skin), defined abs, money, big penis, etc.

Debrief:

- Ask youth, **“Do most people in the world look like this? What’s missing?”** Different ethnicities, different abilities (e.g. people using wheelchairs), regular or low income people, different body sizes, etc.
- Ask youth, **“Why aren’t all people equally represented?”** Typically, whatever groups of people hold the most money and power in a society influences what is currently considered beautiful. The “ideal” body shape has nothing to do with health and very little to do with what each one of us as individuals finds attractive. The body shapes we see most often in the media are a trend determined by the fashion and “beauty” industries that make money off of people believing there’s such a thing as an ideal.
- **“How can it make people feel when they compare themselves to a beauty ‘ideal’?”** Bad, crappy, worthless, and lowers our self-esteem.

Ideally this activity should be followed by:

- Body Image Action Planning Activity
- Body Image Booster