

9. **debilitating:** weakening

many women experience milder but still debilitating⁹ forms of eating disorders. They may never get sick enough to require hospitalization, but they nonetheless devote excessive mental and physical energy to diet and exercise, often jeopardizing their health in the process.

7 For my last four weeks at the hospital I transferred from eating disorders to a general psychology unit. The diagnoses varied, but the number of patients with histories of abuse was astounding. After listening to and reading countless case histories, I began to recognize the patterns. In many cases, domestic battering was chronic, occurring weekly or daily whenever the victim broke some sort of household rule, such as serving dinner late or dressing “too sexy.” The majority of the sexual abuse victims had been raped by people close to them: relatives, ex-boyfriends, or family friends. In one particularly striking case, a patient’s boyfriend made her have sex with five of his friends on a frequent basis.

8 The men who committed these heinous crimes were rarely pathological rapists or batterers. Few would even be deemed mentally ill or classically misogynistic. Rather, they are men who view the real women in their lives in the same manner that they would view a *Playboy* model, a waitress at Hooters, or a prostitute—as objects that exist solely for their pleasure and convenience. These men are not genetically predisposed¹⁰ to disrespect and abuse women. Their attitudes towards women were societally conditioned.

9 Some would argue that pornography did not contribute to these men’s behavior towards women. I disagree. Rape and battery are not new problems, and objectification of women by the media reinforces historically entrenched beliefs that a woman’s main reason for existence is procreation and the sexual pleasure of her mate. Pornographic magazines and lewd posters reduce women to a commodity¹¹ that can be purchased and owned, divorcing the physical manifestation¹² from the person within. The power of popular culture to affect how we eat, how we dress, and how we behave is enormous. Conceptions of gender are in no way immune to this phenomenon.

10 Certainly some of us are more affected by the media than others. Not all teenage girls develop anorexia, nor do all men who read *Playboy* abuse their wives. Nonetheless, the prevalence of both eating disorders and various forms of domestic and sexual abuse indicate major societal trends. The American Anorexia/Bulimia Association reports that 5 percent of women will develop a full-fledged eating disorder, while 15 percent have “substantially disordered eating.” The Family Violence Prevention Program documents that 4 million American women were battered last year. And, yes, I am absolutely convinced that the objectification of women by the media is an integral part of both of these problems, presenting women with unrealistic role models while encouraging men to think of women solely in terms of their sexuality.

11 Women are up against a long history of devaluation and oppression, and, unfortunately, the feminist movements have been only partially successful in purging¹³ those legacies. Sexually charged images of women in the media are not the only cause of this continuing problem, but they certainly play a central role.

Pause Summarize the main idea of paragraph 7.

10. **predisposed:** inclined to something in advance

11. **commodity:** a thing of use, value, or advantage

12. **manifestation:** a visible presence, an outward show

Pause How are you and others you know affected by media images?

13. **purging:** removing something unwanted