The Media Matters

Society has countless flaws but if one fault could be changed, it should be to make all branches of media more aware for the effects of their messages. Media influences much of how young people perceive themselves, yet the people accountable for these messages abuse their responsibility. The stress the media can put on adolescents to be attractive, is tremendous. It is hard enough already to accept our own individual appearances, without the pressures of being shown how far from perfect we really are.

Self-image affects our identity. Adolescents try fitting in by looking right by today’s standards, an impossible task which can overwhelm our already fragile emotional states. Meeting perfection is significantly harder because media only creates pictures of clear skinned teenagers on TV commercials, magazines and billboards. A person can choose not to pick up specific magazines that push the concept of perfection but the television cannot be turned off every time an offending advertisement comes on. Billboards are even harder to avoid. As adolescents race out to grab the next lotion or potion to improve their complexion, they are persuaded to forget that most of the facial images are photo shopped and actors have on makeup applied by experts. Most teens feel they need to buy the latest fashion (Nike shoes) or have the coolest hair (like One Direction) because of images they see on commercials. Males and females with perfect hair and appearances, pose with so called sexy looks on their faces, which is what clothing and facial products such as L’Oreal or Bonds promote. So teenagers search endlessly for products that make them look like the beautiful people constantly thrust at them.

Magazines do not have to be read but ignoring them is difficult when they have huge headlines and pictures of actors, with captions about how an actor’s weight has ‘ballooned’ or ‘plummeted’. Opening the pages of Seventeen or Teen Vogue spreads the message deeper. Images glorify supermodels in tightly fitting dresses with tall, wafer thin bodies. Teens then look at themselves and feel grossly overweight in comparison. Articles on the following pages detail how a person can look like these Barbie dolls. Adolescents then go on the latest diets to make their already thin bodies even smaller. These magazines promote anorexia as perfection, which causes health, mental and possibly eating disorders.

Low self-image is the partner of low self-esteem. Always trying to look like supermodels and famous actors becomes tiring. Projecting the latest impression by dieting and working to have clear skin, can cause a person to feel they will never look good enough. The stress of constant pressure creates an environment where depression sets in. If a teenager is not happy with what they look like they worry if anyone else could be happy with them too. The ability to be content with their appearance is lost because everywhere they go; shop windows project perfectly smiling people. An actor or musician cannot walk out their front door without someone criticizing the way they look. How the rest of the world must cope when we are thought to be less attractive, leads to deeply dissatisfied people.

If any aspect of life in society needs change, it should be the media’s lack of consideration for its clients. They have power over most people’s self-image and devour the self-esteem of individuals struggling to fit the definition of attractive. With this power they have a responsibility to project messages that will help improve the emotional and physical wellbeing of adolescents. For it is the messages we receive now that shape who we are in the future.