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The Effects of Media on Teenage Girls

In today's modern world, most people around the globe can be considered active users of social media. No matter the age, gender, race, or religion, a large majority of our population engages in some form of media on a daily basis. Platforms such as Pinterest, target all groups of individuals, from teenage boys and girls, to the elderly. The truth is, the over consumption of social media has become a norm in our society. As a successfully marketed platform to the public, Pinterest has had an undeniable impact on its users. From the early stages of their adolescence, teenage girls are often the most effectively targeted by the media. The rising popularity of Pinterest, perfectly exemplifies the way in which the media profits off of teenage girls' vulnerability. Young girls are often one swipe away from the newest trends, ones they inevitably fall victim to. Strategically building a users algorithm, Pinterest assures profit from trends set by the same content they provide. In many ways, self-perception becomes only a reflection of what they lack in comparison to the standards of beauty that are set by popular social media trends. Teenage girls' identities are lost in their desire to fit into the standards set by Pinterest's picture perfect mood boards, and countless "aesthetics". Therefore, Pinterest corrupts teenage girls' identities and hinders their individuality because of its contribution to unrealistic beauty standards.

Teenage girls fall victim to social conditioning on a daily basis. Through their loyal consumption of Pinterest, adolescent girls are easily programmed to think of themselves in a manner that brings an advantage to the platform. “According to Pinterest’s official statistics, [sixty percent of its users are women...]” and while, “in theory, Pinterest’s policies should restrict its use to users thirteen and up...” the reality of the matter is that, “demographics around Pinterest usage may not be captured...” with complete accuracy, “as kids often lie about their age to use apps and websites intended for an older audience” (Perez, Sarah. *TechCrunch*). As their days begin, one of the first things a girl will do is reach for her phone; the easiest known access to the newest ideal body type, the new goal body weight, and the return of terms such as “heroin chic”. All of which are aspects of beauty standards defined by photos splattered all over a young girl’s Pinterest board. Journalists Jennifer Lewallen and Elizabeth Behmn-Morawitz, explain “the extent of ‘thinspiration’ messages and images on Pinterest...” and how Pinterest’s perpetuation of this trend “has even earned it the nickname ‘Thinterest,’” among its audience (Jennifer, Lewallen., et al. SageJournals). Wanting to know what the newest trend, in an attempt to keep up, will inevitably push adolescent girls to search for these images and appreciate what can be harmful content. It has become easy to quickly obtain content advertised as “thinspiration” which undeniably leads to the prompting of eating disorders (Jennifer, Lewallen., et al. SageJournals). It is not surprising that mental illnesses such as eating disorders, take over the lives of many adolescent girls. In the pursuit of a beauty standard, young girls will engage in self-harm through the act of restrictive eating and over exercising.

Being welcomed with the unrealistic images presented to them by the platform, results in questioning just how much they must change about themselves to achieve that look. The mental state of an average teenage girl reaches an all time low by the end of the day, all due to their

exposure to endless content. By default, Pinterest is known for its lack of reality. The platform embodies a place of escapism for its users. It focuses on curating content that aligns with the unrealistic beauty standards young girls strive to achieve. Restrictive eating and over exercising are common measures many young girls take under the assumption that such actions will result in their molding to fit standards of beauty. While content such as the promotion of healthy meal plans might seem harmless, the message behind the content can be taken out of proportion. This results in a quick push for harmful behaviors such as restrictive thoughts around food and negative self-talk. Pinterest, due to its marketing of diet-plans, glamorization of thin bodies, and numerous trending aesthetics on the platform, has caused many mental health issues amongst teenage girls. The use of the platform has led teenage girls' to lose parts of their individuality in the processes of turning into the standard of beauty. Alaina Demopoulos, a beauty editor at Allure Magazine, explains how someone might perceive the term "heroin chic," as "really just a term for a cool look..." the "effortlessly cool look..." when asking Sandy Linter about "Gia Carangi, one of the first supermodels [known for] heroin use, who died from Aids complications." (Demopoulos, Alaina. The Guardian). In a way, the term "heroin chic" is glorified by many, as it was used to refer to supermodels and public figures known for embodying the beauty standard.

As all social media platforms do, Pinterest looks to profit off of young women's insecurities. Those parts of themselves that women grow to be insecure about, happen to be manipulated and planted within them in their adolescent years. Teenage girls are presented with an endless list of traits they should change about themselves. To profit from their need to fit into these ever changing standards of beauty, Pinterest perpetuates the idea that there is a perfect body shape, hair color, ideal makeup, and even clothing styles that one must achieve to fit the standard

of beauty. All suggesting that the standard of beauty, despite its unrealistic nature, is what defines the identity and individuality of the woman. With the sharing of content that perpetuates the objectification of girls through marketing brands and products that can achieve this certain look, the content reaches young girls and impacts them negatively in all aspects and areas of their lives. Unrealistic beauty standards are set by Pinterest as terms such as “aesthetic” are used to describe these unreasonable standards and trends. It all happens with their strategic push for flooding adolescent girls’ feeds with constant images of the ideal appearance at the moment. With these heavily edited photos, comes the tagging of products marketed in ways that set teenage girls up to believe they must purchase the items or services in order to achieve a certain look. The platform partners with endless brands around the world. Usually, content creators on Pinterest are paid for their advertisement of numerous things: clothing brands, shoes, makeup, skincare, shapewear, etc. They market these products as “solutions” to women's images and appearance. As one scrolls on the platform, countless ads will appear, advertising the next best product that will achieve a certain look or aesthetic. By doing so, Pinterest and the list of social media platforms that follow the same strategies, perpetually objectify women. Inevitably, the harming messages behind these advertisement strategies reach women from early adolescence. In her piece on “How Unrealistic Beauty Standards Profit from Women’s Insecurities,” author Emma Lennon explains how, “this objectification of women’s bodies contributes to health issues like eating disorders and poor body image,” and in one way or another, infiltrate into many areas of women’s life and identity (Lennon, Emma. *She Defined*).

Relationships are affected too. For decades, romantic relationships have been influenced by the mutual attraction of one person to the other. Somewhere along the way, beauty standards began to matter most when finding a partner. Part of the advertising strategies of many platforms

is to lure women into the idea that purchasing a product such as clothing, will enhance their ability to meet a partner. Every part of a woman's life is used against her where social media is concerned. Teenage girls are often the most vulnerable to the messages sent by Pinterest, as adolescent years are usually the start of romantic experiences and relationships for young women. In her piece, Lennon suggests that social relationships are impacted as the expectation of women due to unrealistic beauty standards "is associated with higher rates of violence against women" (Lennon, Emma. *She Defined*). With this idea in mind, many teenage girls associate the idea of falling in love and being loved with how they are perceived based on their physical appearance. As a result, they seek materialistic solutions to the flaws that they have learned to point out, despite their lack and molding themselves to fit the standard of beauty becomes a priority. Friendships become less pure and real; a girl you once would've considered your friend for the beauty of her personality, is the same girl you will come to compare yourself to. Comparison that will leave you with nothing but resentment towards other girls, simply for having what you feel you lack and desire most. In addition, "with research suggesting those with traditional 'good looks' enjoy better relationships and improved career prospects," this idea pushes toxic beauty standards as it suggests that only women who fit those standards will achieve success in society and amongst social relationships (Lennon, Emma. *She Defined*). It becomes harder to build relationships due to the preconceived perception that they will be judged by others and their image will be picked apart. These ideas are all the direct result of social media platforms like Pinterest, that infinitely contribute to the objectification of women, that begin to influence who they are and their individuality at the start of their adolescent years. Their relationships with themselves also seem to be impacted. Teenage girls are still developing during

those early stages of their teenage years, making it extremely easy for them to adapt habits that can unquestionably lead to self-harm as discussed above.

Pinterest and other social media platforms have taken necessary measures to prevent the spread of harmful messages. Pinterest, for example, has placed policies and guidelines that must be followed by its content creators and users. The platform seeks to stop the spread of any content that could potentially promote self-harm of any form. However, the company's desire to avoid any negative influence might be a little too late to the game. The internet is a permanent place, everything shared out to the public will somehow reach anyone that searches for it specific or topics related to the content. Since Pinterest is centered around mostly the aesthetic of appearances and trends based on cosmetics, fashion, and beauty brands, it is hard for it to control the impact their shared content has on the young girls that make up most of their audience. Sadly, the social media platform knows of its demographics and uses it to its advantage. Inevitably, teenage girls are forced to face a wide and unrealistic list of beauty standards. They have been programmed to shape their identities to fit the social ideals of beauty. Their sense of self is lost to the preconceived ideas that they must achieve one perfect version of beauty that is the standard for all. Therefore, their consumption of Pinterest leads to corruption of their identities and hinders their individuality.

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Annotated Bibliography

Jennifer, Lewallen., et al. *Pinterest or Thinterest?: Social Comparison and Body Image on Social*

Media. SageJournals, 30 March 2016. In this article by authors Jennifer Lewallen and Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz, the authors navigate how Pinterest as a media platform has created an impact on the social comparison and body image perceptions of adolescent girls. The authors of this piece seeked to answer a research question. In relation to my paper, the research article provides major details about the effect of Pinterest on teenage girls. To be more specific, the authors focus on demonstrating how Pinterest has warped the idea of beauty that girls in the early stages of their adolescents form. While the study does express a particular interest for Pinterest, the researchers explain how social media as a whole has perpetuated stereotypes and the unrealistic beauty standards that media contributes to. Based on the hypothesis drowned out by both researchers, it can be concluded that they are siding with the negative impacts of media platforms such as Pinterest, as they heavily focus their research on how these marketed content often targets young adolescent girls and achieve negative outcomes.

Lennon, Emma. *“How unrealistic beauty standards profit from women's insecurities.”* she defined, 20 October 2023. In her piece, Lennon explores the objectification of women's bodies through social media marketing. The author explains how media platforms use women's vulnerability to sell them a quick “fix” to problems they believe they possess due to the unrealistic beauty standards set by the media itself. Lennon clearly suggests that social media platforms consciously set unrealistic beauty standards that are leading

causes of mental disorders such as eating disorders amongst women. Through these very insecurities that are set by the unrealistic beauty expectations, the media profits off of their users due to knowing the majority of women will fall for any quick “fix” or solution to their biggest flaws in comparison to the beauty standard.

Demopoulos, Alaina. “*The term 'heroin chic' needs to die – even if skinny-worship rages on.*”

The Guardian, 21 November 2022. Is an article that explores the return of the term “heroin chic”. The term unfortunately has returned to continue the perpetuation of unrealistic beauty standards. In this case, the toxic background of the term “heroin chic” comes from famous supermodels back in the 90s, who were glamorized for extremely thin bodies and physiques that resembled heroin addicts. Author Alaina Demopoulos, suggests that the term glamorizes unhealthy ways to achieve unrealistic beauty standards. Influential figures such as supermodels, were and still continue to be objectified by the media and as this article suggests, used to lure young girls into the ideal standards of beauty.

Perez, Sarah. “After an investigation exposes its dangers, Pinterest announces new safety tools and parental controls.” *TechCrunch*, 12 April 2023. In this data based article, author Sarah Perez explores the dangers of Pinterest as a social media platform. The piece navigates the concerning details of young girls being watched by older men through Pinterest. As the data shows, most of the platform’s users consist of teenage girls and women. While the rising concern for the safety of its female audience pushes for the application of safety policies, it is inevitable that young girls easily access Pinterest. As the data shows, Pinterest users are mostly made up of teenage girls that enjoy the content specifically marketed to adolescent girls and women. In this article, Perez expresses the

manner in which the Platform is heavily criticized for its lack of safety to the audience they seek to attract and are advertised to.