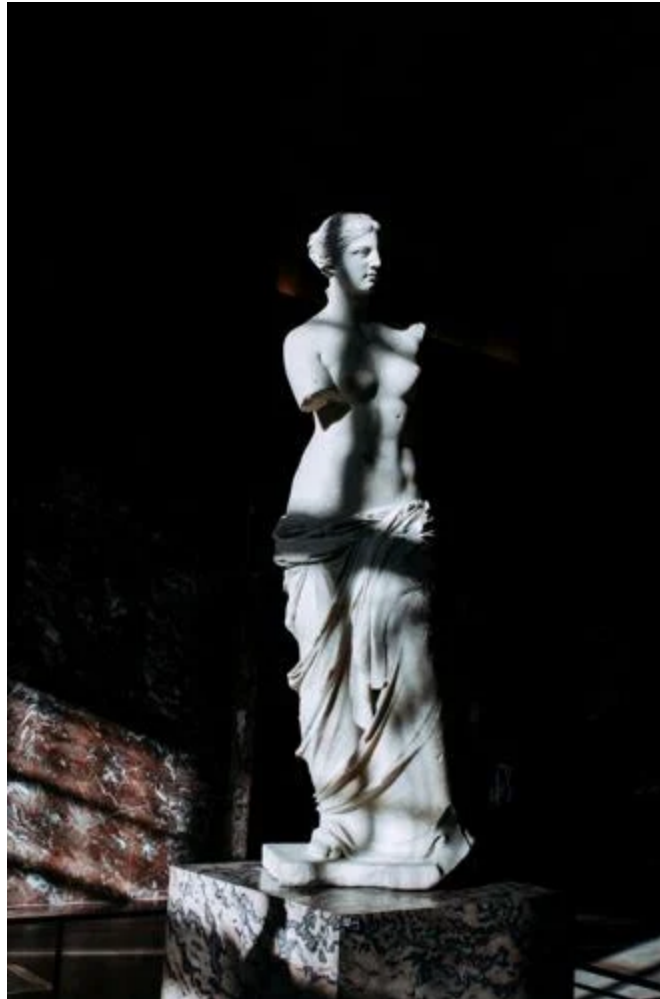


https://www.santafenewmexican.com/life/teen/social-media-drives-body-insecurity-among-teens/article_d54ddb5e-761d-11ef-ad26-ffc4ccfdffd.html

Social media drives body insecurity among teens

By Cora Thompson Generation Next
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The statue Venus de Milo in the Louvre, thought to be a depiction of Aphrodite.

Photo by Tanya Prodaan on Unsplash

Aphrodite, as depicted by ancient Greeks, did not have the body of a modern day supermodel. Throughout most of history, the “ideal” female body has been depicted as curvier and plumper than most of today’s standards; the shift to idealizing skinnier body types flourished only in the 1920s, according to CNN.

Now, social media makes it easier than ever to set unrealistic precedents for beauty, as airbrushing and photoshopping readily distort image subjects into something they're not. Media, however, isn't the only trigger when it comes to fostering body insecurity in young people.

In 2019, a U.K. survey found that 37% of teens felt upset about their body image, according to the Mental Health Foundation. Negative body image can lead to eating disorders, as well as depression and anxiety, according to the Butterfly Foundation, an Australia-based nonprofit supporting people with eating disorders and body image concerns.

For local high schoolers Tate Dillman and Maddie Joseph, who both struggle with body image, the role social media plays in influencing how they perceive themselves is subtle.

"I think it's more subconscious," 17-year-old Dillman, a senior with The MASTERS Program, said in a recent interview.

Dillman said he doesn't consciously react to social media posts with apprehension about his own looks, but it affects him subconsciously.

Joseph, a senior in the dance department at the New Mexico School for the Arts, agrees.

"I think it affects me in a more unnoticed way," she said.

However, there is no doubt media affects body image.

"We're finding more and more that social media is very linked to poor body image," Holly Finlay, clinical director at the Eating Disorder Treatment Center in Albuquerque, said in a phone interview.

Finlay references one study that showed women felt worse about their bodies after looking at photos of models than compared to having not looked at any photos at all. Online posts, which are often photoshopped, present a dangerous influence on adolescents.

"If this is what I see is acceptable, even if it's not real, that's what I'm going to shoot for," Finlay said, speaking about how teens absorb media.

Outside of the internet, however, there are other factors that play into influencing body image.

Joseph, for one, has felt pressure to adhere to certain body standards in dance.

“Growing up in the dance world is never the safest environment for people who struggle with body image,” she said. “Even for NMSA — which is considered a progressive school — there are times when our stricter teachers say some very questionable things about our bodies.”

Additional factors that have played into uprooting her confidence in her body have been puberty, as well as a form of generational trauma, Joseph said.

“Mothers never experienced a healthy, positive body image, and [they] pass it on to their daughters,” she added.

There’s an emphasis in studies and the media on the struggle women and girls face to keep up with beauty standards, but many men and boys, like Dillman, also deal with body insecurity. In fact, 90% of men struggle with body dissatisfaction, according to Bradley University.

“Sometimes it’s really just crippling where I don’t want to leave my house,” Dillman said. “You’re stuck in your body, so if you’re anxious about your body, you’re going to be anxious about everything else.”

Regardless of gender, there are steps to take to regain a positive body image.

Finlay notes that media literacy can be essential in maintaining body confidence — for example, questioning whether a social media post has been photoshopped.

Finlay offers several questions a person can ask themselves: “Is it helping? Is it hurting? Is it making things worse? Do you feel better about yourself or worse about yourself after you look at these images and you’re on this site?”

She further stresses staying away from media that evokes insecurity. A change in mindset is also vital in maintaining a positive body image, such as practicing positive thinking and self-forgiveness, according to the National Alliance for Eating Disorders.

Joseph advises taking the time to develop an appreciation for one’s body. For a dancer like her, this has had a powerful, positive effect.

“The most important thing for me has just been acknowledging the good things about my body,” she said. “I’m so strong. I’m so powerful.”

Cora Thompson is a senior at The MASTERS Program. Contact them at corat.9675@gmail.com.