

# Reflecting Perfection

*Outside influences affect views on true beauty*

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When children are small, some parents have to drag their kids to the shower or bribe them with bubbles and toys just to bathe. Then, they turn 12 or 13 years-old. Young teens start spending hours in the bathroom, in front of the mirror. Their obsession all comes down to one word: appearance. Webster's Dictionary defines appearance as the "look or outward aspect of a person or thing." Most people care about appearances to some degree, but there is a question as to why some teenagers try so hard on their looks. From expensive brand name clothing, extreme dieting, putting on pounds of makeup, fake tans and even plastic surgery, some teens go to extreme lengths to look their best.

The looming question is why? Why do some teenagers go all out on their looks? Why do they feel so insecure and constantly under pressure? For teenagers who are paranoid about how they look all the time, there are a few explanations as to why their appearance seems to matter so much.

"I read once that girls focus on looks so much to prove to each other who is better," senior Abby Lieberman said. "Just by looking at a person, you can tell who spends more time getting ready in the morning. I also think girls generally have the need to be the best and be acknowledged by men."

As boys and girls alike try to fit in they try on different looks by either copying the appearance of people they want to be associated with or by working hard to look unique.

"Adolescents are searching for their identity," BV West counselor Tara Lebar said. "They try on different identities, and eventually find out [who they're] going to be as a person."

One of these identities some teenagers try is being fashionable while trying to figure out what to wear based off their peers and the media. Typical teenage girl magazines like *Seventeen* and *Teen Vogue*, have headlines such as "Top Five Trendsetters" and "75 Ways to Make You Look Fabulous" which advise teens on how they can

change themselves and become a more "ideal" person. Unfortunately these "ideal" women are often stick thin with flawless skin. Young men look to *Men's Health*, *ESPN* and *Sports Illustrated* and create a comparison of their own bodies with those of professional adult athletes.

"The media is a very big part in dictating appearances," Lebar said. "The industry kind of dictates who and what is beautiful. The media is also a big part of insecurities, which are already there naturally."

Another influence on how teens are changing themselves comes from their peers and who seem to matter the most in the student population. When a teen tries to find their identity, he or she learns about themselves through others' reactions. A girl may deem herself either attractive or ugly based on whether boys' heads turn when they walk by.

"Feedback is important," Lebar said. "It all has to do with self-esteem, too."

While some people don't care what others think or do, many need confirmation from those around them. As teenagers, these reactions affect both boys and girls on a greater level. According to *Adolescence* by Laurence Steinberg, a book entailing the psychology behind how adolescents view themselves, males are under pressure to stay "manly." Big peeks and a six-pack are the goals. Further explained in the book is that girls are not as pressured to maintain a feminine image compared to the pressure men face to keep a strong masculine image while not adopting any "feminine" traits.

Teens fortunate enough to have parents who taught them to value internal beauty over appearances have greater self-confidence and are less vulnerable to external pressures. These teenagers are more comfortable with themselves and their appearance.

"I take about 20 or 30 minutes to get ready in the morning, depending on the day," junior Mackenzie Osborne said. "Not much more than that."

Some teenagers don't really stress about their appearance, and focus on other things they deem more important.

"I don't see the point," sophomore Morgan

Hannah said. "It's just school, we're there for the day and then most of us go home. If other girls want to take more time to get ready in the morning, that's fine with me."

Taking time in the morning is important to insecure girls because they are able to hide their insecurities behind make-up and hair. The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty is reaching out to girls in an attempt to help them see their natural, authentic beauty. In early 2010, the Dove Movement for Self Esteem was born. Earlier this year, in a Dove study of over 1,200, 10 to-17 year-old girls, 72 percent said they felt a tremendous amount of pressure to be beautiful. The same study showed that only 11 percent of girls are comfortable using the word "beautiful" to describe their looks.

With corporations such as Girl Scouts of America, Boys and Girls Club of America, and many others, Dove has created educational self-esteem building activities that encourage, inspire and motivate girls around the world to feel beautiful the way they are. The Dove Movement for Self-Esteem has reached over 7 million girls so far and with these programs they set a global goal of reaching 15 million girls by the year 2015.

The National Football League and several other health and wellness organizations have developed programs that emphasize fitness over appearance. The NFL's Play 60, Kids on the Move and Boxing Fitness for CHAMPS emphasizes young men maintaining good habits for health throughout their lives. These programs also put less emphasis on the idea of every man being a professional athlete but rather engaging in exercise as a way to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

These programs for young adults have made many efforts, and they are trying to help all teens move in the right direction. But, there is still much more work to be done.

Unfortunately, girls will still wake up in the morning and take every precaution to look "gorgeous." Hopefully girls will someday be able to call themselves "beautiful" when they look in the mirror.

