

YOUNG PEOPLE SHOULDN'T HAVE TO NAVIGATE DIGITAL LIFE ALONE, NEITHER SHOULD THE ADULTS WHO CARE FOR THEM



A NOTE FROM DR. VICKERY, FOUNDER OF MINDFUL MEDIA

When I reflect on my own teenage years navigating airbrushed magazines, I realize how much harder it is for today's youth facing generative AI and algorithmic feeds. We often hope that because kids know filters exist, they are emotionally protected from the harmful influence on their body image. However, social comparison happens in the *feeling* of the encounter, not in the *intellectual analysis* afterward. As adults, our job is to foster media literacy, support youth agency, and offer a steady, corrective lens that steers them away from the funhouse-mirror effect of social media feeds. Equally important, we must hold space for their feelings and ensure screens do not become the primary foundation of their identity.

KNOWING AN IMAGE IS FAKE ISN'T ENOUGH

Research shows that knowing an image is filtered or AI-generated doesn't stop teens from comparing themselves to it. Because adolescents construct their identities partially from media, they internalize algorithmic beauty standards that are biased toward thinness, whiteness, and sameness. While adults measure synthetic images against an established sense of self, teens are still building that frame of reference, folding artificial and unrealistic ideals into who they are becoming. Critical media literacy can help youth reclaim some agency.



3 QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT MEDIA & BODY IMAGE

1. What makes it so easy to feel insecure about an edited or AI photo, even when you know it's fake?
2. What does it feel like when your feed is full of 'glow-up' routines, 'looksmaxxing' tips, or ideal body types?
3. What is a quality, hobby, or vibe you have that a camera or photo filter could never capture?



3 QUESTIONS TO SUPPORT MEDIA LITERACY

1. How many takes, filter layers, or edits do you think went into making this photo look effortless?
2. Is this post sharing authentic self-expression, or is an algorithm using this trend to sell a product or keep you scrolling?
3. If you could redesign your feed to make you feel more confident or grounded, what's the first thing you'd change?



3 ONLINE MEDIA TRENDS & PRACTICES

1. **AI Face-Rating** - Uploading selfies to AI tools for scores or flaw breakdowns
2. **Looksmaxxing** - subculture focused on maximizing appearance through self-improvement, grooming, or extreme methods
3. **Body Checking** - compulsive monitoring, measuring, or displaying one's body online to assess appearance or seek validation