Lesson for Real People Aren’t Perfect, Perfect People Aren’t Real

LEARNING OBJECTIVES
By the end of this lesson, students will be able to

1) Identify unrealistic portrayals of the human body by scrutinizing popular media.
2) Describe at least two ways that unrealistic portrayals of the human body have an impact on people individually and in relationships.

TIME NEEDED
50 minutes

MATERIALS
• Copies of “Real People Aren't Perfect, Perfect People Aren't Real”—one per student
• Recent issues of magazines that your students read or that target teenagers—one per student
• Copies of a recent high school yearbook—one per student

PREPARATION
• Gather yearbooks and magazines, so that each student will have one for use during the lesson.

• You can do a poll beforehand to determine which magazines students read. Scan magazine titles and content to be sure they are appropriate for use in your school.
• This exercise will be most productive when students have an opportunity to review a yearbook that is current, not outdated in terms of visual representations of students’ clothes, hairstyles, etc. Check with your school's library or yearbook staff assistant for extra copies that may be available.

PROCEDURE
1. Review class ground rules with your students. Remind students that they have the right to pass on verbal contributions. [1 minute]

2. Distribute one magazine and one yearbook to each student. If you don’t have enough magazines or yearbooks, students can work in pairs. Tell students to put the magazine and yearbook side by side on their desks. [1 minute]

3. Tell students they will have 10 minutes to look through the yearbook and the magazine, paying close attention to how people look in each publication. Ask students not to get caught up in the content of magazine articles or yearbook captions; they should just look at the photographs of people. As students are browsing their publications, remind them to pay close attention to how people look in the photographs. Remind students that you will have a discussion when the ten minutes is up about what they notice as they compare each kind of publication. Circulate throughout the room to assist students in staying on task. [10 minutes]
4. When time is up, facilitate a discussion using the following questions:

- What did you notice when you looked at the photographs from the yearbook alongside the photographs from the magazine?
- How would you describe the people in the magazine photographs? What about the people in the yearbook photographs?
- Who is missing from the magazine photographs? Who seems overrepresented?
- What is the impact when the same kinds of people are represented a lot, while others are seen very little or not at all?
- What conclusions can you draw about the kinds of pictures that are used in magazines?

Ask students to take a moment to consider the following question and tell them that you will not ask for their answers: After flipping through the magazine, how did you feel about yourself? [10 minutes]

5. Distribute copies of the article “Real People Aren’t Perfect, Perfect People Aren’t Real” and read together with your students. [5 minutes]

6. When students have finished reading the article, ask the following questions:

- How does this article relate to the exercise you just did with the magazines and the yearbooks?
- What elements of this story can you relate to?
- One of the things you’ll probably notice from your magazines is that many of the photos are of adults, but teenagers are reading the magazines. What do you think of that? [5 minutes]

7. Tell students that as human beings, we have reactions to what we see. Many teenagers compare their own bodies to those represented in the media, using media representations as a guide to how they should look. As we’ve discovered, media portrayals are very often unrealistic. Given this, ask students to brainstorm ways that a teenager might feel when comparing their bodies to those represented in the media. As students offer their brainstorm ideas, record them on the board. Try to get a list of at least ten different words or phrases.

[Facilitator’s Note: You may need to encourage students to think about the kinds of words that describe these feelings. Words, such as “inadequate,” “weird” or “unattractive,” might come to mind.] [5 minutes]

8. Recap for students that looking at unrealistic portrayals of the human body can have an impact on how people feel about themselves. Now, ask students to respond to the following questions:

- What impact do you think unrealistic portrayals of the human body have on how we view other people?
- In what ways can these unrealistic portrayals affect our relationships with friends? With people you might be romantically interested in? [10 minutes]

9. Close the lesson by reminding students that popular media’s goal is to sell a product. Companies are focused on achieving this goal, even if it means distorting how the people in their ads look. Remind the students that it’s important to step back every once in a while and compare what they’re seeing in the media to what’s really going on around them. [3 minutes]