
Impact Of Editing Programs On Body Image

Image enhancing is commonplace in the 21st century, as competition has increased significantly in many areas of life, such as the job market. Children and adults alike are constantly exposed to images, depicting unrealistic body types in advertisements, cinema, magazines and other types of media. This has influenced many issues, such as a spike in depression (along with other mental health issues) and eating disorders in various age groups. The phenomenon of warped body image is nothing new, it has been around for millennia, and the perfect body has always been hard to attain, however, the type of body that is considered ideal today has only come to be in the 19th century, due to the shift from manual labour. Despite the fact that it is nothing new, the ideal body image is more of a concern now than ever, as with the recent advancements in technology, image editing programs now allow for seamless, easy and fast beautification of photographs. This essay will argue that the editing programs are merely tools that, while enabling the unwanted trend of unhealthy body image, are not directly responsible for it, as these applications were not created with the express purpose of enhancing photographs of people.

Presently, social media is an integral part of many people's lives, with over one billion people having signed up for Instagram as of June 2018. It is plain to see, that with such a powerful presence in the society, social media is bound to have an effect on the way people perceive themselves. Because of that, Instagram and social media, in general, have been a topic of heated debate for the past few years. A common concern is celebrities that retouch their photographs since these celebrities are often perceived as idols by younger audiences. This sets up an unhealthy precedent, with many children engaging in unhealthy dieting practices. But celebrities are not the only ones affecting people's self-esteem, as a matter of fact, research has shown that people, regardless of age, tend to compare themselves to their peers more than celebrities for qualities such as character, intelligence, and physical attributes, like height and weight. Since Photoshop requires a certain level of skill in order to create realistic images, few users, apart from celebrities, heavily edit their photographs before sharing them. This would mean that, while Photoshop does play an underlying role in body image distortion, the bigger part is played by regular people. For example, a trend sprung up in recent years, promoting dangerous dieting practices, called "thinspiration". Thinspiration is thin-ideal media content that intentionally encourages weight loss, often in a manner that glorifies dangerous behaviours, similar to eating disorders (Lewis and Arbuthnott, 2012). Thinspiration content often comes with advice and aggressive encouragement on losing weight and staying thin. The trend started off on websites, dedicated to eating disorders, but has since spread to popular social media websites. Thanks to the advanced searching techniques, present in most social networks, that allow for fast and easy content lookup, one can find thinspiration content in a matter of minutes, by looking up appropriate hashtags. This means that coming across such content by accident is trivial, especially since teens are now spending, on average, over 3 hours on social media a day.

Apart from social media, people are often exposed to unrealistic images of people in magazines, cinema and TV.

Lastly, unrealistic depiction of the human body is commonplace in advertising, which is present

in every form of mass media. Advertising has a tendency to rely on image editing the heaviest, as advertising space tends to hold high value, while catching the attention of a potential customer is not an easy task in the present day. Because of that, the advertising industry is commonly criticized for displaying unrealistic photographs of beauty and fashion, which can have a negative influence on impressionable people.

In conclusion, image altering applications have only become capable enough to fool the human eye in the late 20th century, while body image issues have been around long before that, and, even though Photoshop and similar software, no doubt, make it trivial to amplify photographs, people would be struggling with their self-perception with or without them. In fact, photo editing software has done more good than evil, helping make advertising more efficient and easy to produce, allowing for restoration of old or corrupted photographs and so on. The real reason people are struggling with their body image is social media, which is the most personal form of media yet, placing one close to their ideal body of desire, thus amplifying self-discontent. Many celebrities don't need to alter their images at all, since maintaining their body in perfect shape is paramount in their respective professions. Social media needs to be regulated more tightly, with stricter age ratings and disclaimers about the hazards that may lay within. In addition, closer monitoring of children's internet activity would be an appropriate way of minimizing the risk of body image distortion. On top of all that, children should be made more aware of these hazards in schools: perhaps, an addition can be made to sex ed, describing the dangers of body image distortion.