Body Image As A Problem Of Young People

Body image is a huge issue facing young people today. It can be described as the way that someone observes their body and the thoughts and feelings that comes from that perception. These thoughts and feelings can be negative, positive or both and are affected by social pressure, family, friends and the media. As a young female surrounded by social media, and several external pressures, this issue definitely resonates with me. To better understand body image as a youth issue, I have gathered information from several secondary sources.

According to The Australian Medical Association, body image is described as ”how an individual conceptualises his or her physical appearance. The body image a person has results from the interaction between the person’s thoughts, beliefs, feelings and behaviours regarding their own body”. (Australian Medical Association, 2009). A poor body image can have serious impacts on a young persons’ health. Generally, someone with an unhealthy body image can feel the need to diet, has low self-esteem, low self-confidence and never feels like their body is good enough. It can also result in the development of eating disorders including anorexia, bulimia and obesity. Poor body image adds to anxiety, depression, issues in relationships, and the growth of substance abuse problems and as a result of this, several health problems. Someone with body image issues may have low self-esteem, therefore, they could have problems within their relationships and their workplace. A negative body image can impact a young person’s social health as they may avoid going out with their friends and family because they feel they aren’t good enough, which in turn leads them to feel isolated and alone.

As stated by Mission Australia National Youth Survey “at least 1 in 4 young people have serious body image concerns”. This issue affects personal and community health by giving us false perceptions of how our bodies should appear, blurring how we feel about our physical appearance, changing the way we think and talk to ourselves about our bodies and how others perceive us. The responsibility for promoting a positive body image starts at home. Parents can be positive role models by accepting their bodies and having a healthy attitude towards food and exercise.

Society plays a large role in negatively impacting our body image in the media. Images of good-looking women are everywhere- magazines, movies, shows and television. The media has been known to make us feel inadequate with our current shape, therefore making us feel that we need to change to fit this unrealistic perception. We are constantly surrounded with images of superficial, thin women, who at times have been modified and airbrushed to create an illusion of perfection. This is having a detrimental effect on our youth and is creating complex mental health issues, which is highlighted in the dove ad.

Our school system has a strong responsibility for addressing health-related priorities in relation to this issue. The theme topic is current and an accepted topic of discussion. To make this a priority, schools educate us about self-esteem, self-confidence and validating that we are always enough. Although schools are unable to control what’s happening on social media, they do not tolerate bullying of any nature, which would impact the situation negatively.

The New South Wales Department of Health coordinates a health campaign known as “Live,

life well”. This initiative assists children and parents to increase levels of physical activity, improved dietary intake and assist young people with the necessary body aims to coordinate healthy body imaging.

Obesity is the main reason for a poor body image. Not only is it able to impact the individual on a social level, but on a physical level can lead to diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease and strokes and has links with sleep apnoea, arthritis and liver disease. In 2014 to 2015, the majority of Australian adults (63%) were overweight or obese, as indicated by the Australian’s Health Association. In 2017-2018, the Australian Bureau National Health Survey showed that this figure had dropped overall by 3% to 60%.

This suggests the initiatives are productive. Government initiatives assist schools by other health initiatives to focus on lifestyle changes, such as smoking, nutrition, physical activity, alcohol use and stress management. The “Quit now” website provides information and resources and alcohol intake as well as links to current and previous campaigns which in turn relates directly to body image.

There are companies on social media that are trying to change the definition of beauty and The Dove Campaign Real Beauty is a great example of a body-positive campaign that focuses on self-esteem and inner beauty. In year 6, our class watched an advertisement developed by their company in 2013. Dove collaborated with a company called Real Beauty Sketches, to create a 6-minute video that explored the gap between how others perceive us and how we observe ourselves. Many women were asked to describe themselves to a forensic artist, Zamora. Zamora instructed the women to tell him about her features, the whole time a curtain separates the artist from his subject, the women negatively described themselves, with comments like big jaw; that when she smiles, her chin dips a little bit and that she has a fat, rounder face. He repeated this same process with three women. Privately, the women were asked to describe the other women they met, their features etc. The forensic artist then brought the women back into the room and showed two different sketches- one of her self-described image and one of how someone else had described her and what they found was they were completely different. The image described by others was more beautiful, open, friendly and happy.

The purpose of the experiment was to demonstrate that often our self-perceptions are very harsh and unflattering and that often it is not how the world sees us. We are so focused on our imperfections and things that aren’t quite right when we should be grateful for our natural beauty and put our attention into what we do like. I was upset while watching this short film because it disappoints me how little self-esteem women in this society really have. We all need more self-love and acceptance of ourselves. At the end of the day though, only you can really define your beauty, people can have their opinions, but it is you who decides what is right and wrong about the way you look. Unfortunately, the issue is significant and 90% of young people are unhappy with their bodies.

In summary, the responsibility of promoting a healthy body image starts at home – parents can easily be a positive role model by accepting their bodies and by having positive attitudes towards exercise and food. The community are responsible for negatively impacting our body images as we are constantly surrounded by superficial, thin women, creating unrealistic expectations of what we should look like. The school system also plays a large role in positively affecting body image as we are educated about self-esteem, self-confidence and the validation that we are always enough. I believe that we all need to accept our bodies as they are and no

matter what shape, size or package we come in, we all deserve love and to feel like we are enough.