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Grade 9

Comparison Is the Thief of Joy

Why do nearly half of preadolescent girls in America today feel they fall short of beauty standards? According to the National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA), it appears that “unattainable standards set by social media are directly tied to this rise in body-related struggles.” I, too, became corrupted by the influencers recommended on my feed and have hundreds of skincare products in my bathroom to prove it. So if I could go back in time and tell my twelve-year-old self anything, it would be “Comparison is the thief of joy. Don’t let anyone, including yourself, take your joy.”

Social media influencers are constantly promoting products for smooth skin but actually turn your skin into leather. Who can blame them? They earn a commission whenever you use their promo code. However, the only people who need chapstick are those who use it. It’s true. Think of the average guy in your life and how often he uses chapstick. Unfortunately, I had to learn this lesson the hard way.

When teenage girls think of “society’s standards” they are subconsciously referring to their cliques at school: theater kids, band kids, speech and debate kids, trend followers, etc. Ask yourself, what’s the value of following trends? For example, remember the VSCO girls? Teenagers were insecure because they didn’t have Fjällräven backpacks, plastic-free straw mottos, Hydroflasks, Carmex, and scrunchies, and now those items are irrelevant. They disappeared in 2022.

In March 2025, I had my epiphany during Bible class scrolling on TikTok after completing my assignment. I didn't see anything wrong with this because everyone else was doom-scrolling or playing games. My academically-driven friend tapped my shoulder. "Sophie, we should delete TikTok. We're addicted." I looked at her in disbelief envisioning my life without the trending videos, but she pushed me over the edge. So I said, "Only if we quit together."

Deleting TikTok has been the best decision of my life. These days, I would clean my room or read a book. I'm less stimulated and feel more present at home and around friends. Conversing with others has allowed me to share thoughts I've kept to myself and feel happier for it. Lastly, I stopped having tunnel vision from bingeing videos. Now, I can clearly remember what happened five minutes ago, completing tasks in a more focused manner. I know social media won't change, but I can.

Your turn?