**Identity and Self Image**

A 50-minute high school or introductory college-level teaching module  
Version 1.0

A project by the Intergalactic Defenders of the Digital Universe

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This is intended to be a living document. Feedback, suggestions, and reports of your experience using these materials are welcome and encouraged. Please contact us at

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## **Desired Learning Outcomes**

How does social media impact your identity and self-image?

At the end of this modules, students should:

* Understand how social media differs from real life
* Understand the difference between an online identity and a true identity.
* Identify realistic and unrealistic expectations of body image or success.
* Be able to identify key differences between their life and the idealized lives on social media.
* Be able to distinguish between realistic personal goals and unrealistic social-media driven goals.

## **Lesson Materials**

## **Introduction**

Influencers on social media often present unrealistic body images or images of success. The power of these videos is that the persona is that of someone just like you who lives a spectacular life, or has amazing accomplishments. That image may be completely false, or may obscure the hard work and resources that make it possible.

Exposure to these images can lead youth to feel inadequate, and can worsen (or trigger) mental health issues.

Learning to distinguish between the lives of influencers on social media and realistic lives is important for students.

### **Discussion led by instructor**

What is an “influencer” and what do they do on social media?

Name several influencers. What platforms do they use; Tik Tok, Twitch, YouTube, Instagram? What type of content do they post?

What makes the influencer different or special?

Do you feel pressure to live up to the standards of influencers you see online?

Optionally watch “Social Media Isn’t Real (Even if it looks like it is)”:

<https://www.ted.com/talks/samantha_cohen_social_media_isn_t_real_even_if_it_looks_like_it_is>

### **Individual Work**

Write down how you define success. What determines success? Is it relative to someone else or is it a personal goal? If it is relative to someone else, who is that? A family member, a mentor, or someone famous (media, arts, athletes, or social media)?

### **Small Group Discussion**

In small groups of 3-5, identify several influencers that you are familiar with. For each, write down:

1. What special skill or talent they have that makes them popular.
2. How difficult they make it appear. Does it look effortless, or does it appear to be very difficult? Do they put a great deal of time into their art, or does it look like it’s something they “just do”, without needing to work hard.
3. Do you think that achieving their “look” or replicating their accomplishments is possible? If so, what work would you need to put into the task? What resources (time, money, equipment) would you need?

Now, in the same groups, identify several athletes, musicians, TV or streaming stars, or movie stars. For each of them, answer the same questions.

### **Large Group Discussion**

Have each group read out one of their influencers and one of their athlete/musician/media-star answers.

As a group, discuss the meaning of success. Do you define success by comparison to someone else’s accomplishments, or is it a personal goal?

Have each student take out their individual definition of success and ask if any have second thoughts regarding their choices.

### **Wrap Up Discussion**

Success is attainable, but it is the product of hard work over time. The magic of media is to make the difficult appear to be effortless. The Twitch streamer who is undefeated, the world champion athlete, the perfect Instagrammer all put in hundreds and thousands of hours of hard work to achieve their results.

### **[Optional] Assignment**

Read “Talent is Overrated” or the essay “What it takes to be Great”. Research one influencer “behind the scenes” (i.e. how do they do what they do), read (or watch a documentary) about one athlete or media star and how they approach their career or craft. Write a short essay on the difference between the hard work (behind the scenes) and the effortless performance that they present.

## **Resources (popular):**

“Can Our Body Image Handle Social Media: Live Life Unfiltered” <https://www.ted.com/talks/keisha_and_teagan_simpson_can_our_body_image_handle_social_media_live_life_unfiltered>

“How Social Media Shapes Our Identity” <https://www.newyorker.com/books/under-review/how-social-media-shapes-our-identity>

“Barriers to an individual's healthy self image”

<https://www.ted.com/talks/lauren_jones_barriers_to_an_individual_s_healthy_self_image>

“Social Media Isn’t Real (Even if it looks like it is)”

<https://www.ted.com/talks/samantha_cohen_social_media_isn_t_real_even_if_it_looks_like_it_is>

“What It Takes to Be Great”, Geoffrey Colvin [Book form: “Talent is Overrated]

## **Resources (Academic):**

“Self-Esteem, Social Comparison, and Facebook Use” <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6266525/>