

Don't fear the mess

By Tabitha Wells

We live in a world obsessed with perfection. With the rise of social media programs designed to showcase our lives to the world through series of comments, snippets, and photos, we pick the best, add a filter, and publish. Much like photoshop allows an artist or photographer to erase the blemishes, tidy up the blurred lines, tone, tighten, and brighten, our phones allow us to touch-up the world around us, projecting the image of how we want our lives to look instead of how they really are.

We eliminate the mess and the struggles to create a picture of how we want our lives to be perceived. Perfectly organised pillows on a clean couch, the tins on your counter arranged to catch the light at the right angle, phone held up in a way to make you look your best.

The world sees the perfection, but we forego the reality. We convince ourselves we're doing it to put our best foot forward, so people see who we believe we really are.

In doing this, we feed into the monster telling others their lives aren't quite perfect enough because they don't model the ones in the feeds we're staring at. Even though we are posting the same kind of perfect life, we're fooled into believing the lives of perfection flowing through our newsfeeds are actually perfect. We weigh ourselves against those feeds, wondering why our lives aren't actually as perfect as those we see flashing by as we scroll.

These platforms that consume our lives can have a negative impact even on the most healthy minds, but the impact they can have on those of us struggling with our mental health can be devastating. They remind us of our failures, of where we are lacking, and draw our attention to everything that's great about everyone else.

Within Christianity, there is often talk about the need for authenticity ? to act, speak, and live in truth and in a manner that shows the reality of our brokenness. In the world today, everything seems to lead us to the opposite. Advertising, clothing, and TV shows all craft the same ideas as our newsfeeds ? that life doesn't need to be messy, and that beauty and perfection go hand in hand.

Life is always messy. Whether or not you are dealing with mental health issues, it's complicated and difficult, and filled with dust and mothballs, oily faces, bags under our eyes, laundry tossed on the table. It overflows with wrong decisions and bad hair days, weeds on the lawn, people who hurt us, and people we've hurt.

We shouldn't be afraid to be authentic, to let the world know the realities of our struggles. To fear someone catching a glimpse of the dirty laundry behind us or the not so flawless look of our skin.

We shouldn't be afraid of the mess or the idea that the world sees it.

Of course, that doesn't mean we should be itching to air all of our dirty laundry online for all the world to see. Swinging the pendulum too far in the opposite direction can have the exact same effect ? and honestly, there are things the world doesn't need to know or see. But allowing the world to see the mess isn't about disclosing your drama, your heartaches, or your current hurts or anger; it's simply about letting the world see your reality. It's about not hiding when things are not perfect.

We need to learn to love ourselves exactly where we're at, whether we're a hot mess, the picture of perfection, or somewhere in between, and we need to learn not to let the world tell us we should be anything other than that.

Sure, some days my house is so clean it sparkles, my hair does what it's supposed to, and I manage to apply my makeup in a way that my skin looks flawless and airbrushed. Show it off, and be proud of it. But don't be afraid to show off and be proud of the moments that aren't perfection either.

When we begin to showcase our reality instead of our dream and begin to see the same from others, we allow ourselves to be inspired to live our lives to our individual fullest, rather than continuously striving for some unachievable lifestyle.

This May, as Mental Health Awareness Month comes to a close, I want to give you a challenge. If you, like myself and many others, find joy and entertainment in our ability to share online, strive to be genuine. Don't worry about making everything perfect before posting. Throw perfection to the wind and show the reality.

Showcase your life both as it is and as you want it to be, not as some goal none of us can achieve.

Social media may be credited with being a destructive tool for our mental health, but I don't believe it has to be. It has the capability to connect us with one another and allow us to share together in a positive manner.

Social media is just a tool, but we are the ones that wield it. While we might never change its impact as a whole, we do have the power to create a ripple of change within our own circles ? to make reality the goal instead of perfection, to take a negative and make it that positive.

#thisisMH