

HONEY, WE'RE SHAMING THE KIDS

MAKEOVER SHOWS AREN'T KNOWN FOR BEING KIND. PART OF the appeal of tough-love shows like *What Not to Wear* or *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* is their humorous evisceration of the participants' pre-makeover clothes, hair, or body.

But what if you didn't choose your makeover fate? What if, without your consent, humiliating images of you were broadcast across the country as a mass warning? If you're a

chubby kid, that's just the threat TLC's new show *Honey, We're Killing the Kids!* poses. Here, kids are the symbol of the obesity epidemic, and their humiliation is perpetrated under the guise of good intentions and medical science.

A typical show involves a family in trouble: Both parents and kids—there are invariably two or more—are shown going about their daily routine of bad food choices (sugary

breakfasts, fast-food dinners, lots of processed snacks and sodas), and are then introduced to nutritionist Dr. Lisa Hark, whose job is to save the family from going any further down the road to diabetes, heart disease, and high blood pressure. But before the show can address the behavior that could lead to these things, it gives the parents a scare: digitally created images of their sweet 9- and 12-year-old children morphing into fat, unhappy fortysomethings.

What unfolds is an almost comic progression, first from sunny kid to sullen-looking, zit-faced teen. In the 20s, the frowns appear, along with the occasional nose ring (presumably to telegraph trouble). As the years click by, the frowns deepen, the faces get more bloated, the hair more frizzy or poorly dyed or pathetically combed over an obvious bald spot. The skin is pockmarked and ruddy, the eyebrows unkempt. **By the time the image reaches a projected 40 years old, once-cute children are looking like mug shots from *Cops*** and, if they're male, sporting unfortunate facial hair. Cue Dr. Lisa intoning to foreboding music, "You are killing your kids!"

But it's not death that's implied by the montage of bad hair and washed-out wardrobes—it's ugliness and, by extension, unhappiness.

Over the course of the show—each hour encompasses a three-week span—the focus is on behaviors, not looks: The parents cook rather than get takeout, the family eats together, the

parents try to quit smoking, all of which are directed toward better living.

For the big finish, the parents are rewarded with a revised image of their children at 40. This morph is dramatically different: Smiles appear. Boys who had gone bald in the earlier projection suddenly sport full, glossy heads of hair. Sloppy t-shirts and frizzy hair are replaced with business suits and professional haircuts. Blotchy skin becomes porcelain.

Ultimately, *Honey, We're Killing the Kids!* means well, and its message—we don't think about what we eat, and then eat too much of it—is an important one. But the show's money-shot morphs are just a reiteration of the same stereotypes the diet industry has been dishing out for decades: There are no attractive, well-groomed fat people, and to be fat means to be miserable and poor. For a show about changing habits, that's one ugly message. —Heather Boerner

