

What Is Your Definition of Beauty?

This month I have decided to tackle a subject that has been quite a learning experience for me. I have, unknowing of the outcome, opened up the taboo box of Beauty in America. In this endeavor, I have had the opportunity to ask five people, from different ages and walks of life, this question, "What is your definition of Beauty?" In this I have gotten quite stunning answers. The first question went to a 24 year old woman (who many would consider to be very beautiful) and her response was "Megan Fox! A very put together look, beauty is nothing to do with personality. It is all about outward appearance." Then she angrily stated, "I've learned this from experience." She stated this as though she has all too often been the victim of rejection, to which I personally couldn't understand about her.

My question next went to a 23 year old man in which he stated, "True love, kindness, and care for all, not being judgmental or acting as if you are better than others, because some very pretty people can also be the most ugly on the inside. I think beauty is born within and shines to all from within as well." (He's a little whimsical, however, he may just have something.)

I then asked my (almost 3 year old) daughter what her definition for beauty was, "It means I love you!" she boldly stated. That seemed to be a good answer, but even after bribing her with a cookie she wouldn't explain it any further.

So, next I moved on to the "little older and a little wiser" group. I asked a 59 year old woman and she said, "Beauty is your heart. If your heart is good and you are kind to others, then you will be beautiful. If your heart is evil, then you will not be beautiful at all."

"Beauty is in the eye of the beholder," stated a 48 year old man. "The definition of Beauty is different for every one."

So, now that I was thoroughly confused I decided to look up the good ol' Webster's definition of Beauty, which reads: "The qualities that give pleasure to the senses." That still seemed pretty vague to me, so my next step was to observe and do some research on human behavior, by doing this I learned that the beauty "industry" and the media are responsible for providing an absolutely unrealistic and unattainable image of 'beauty.'

Over 90% of images distributed by the media are manipulated and altered, not just slightly, but in a major way and unrecognizable to the person that was in the photo in the first place. In a study of girls 9 to 10 years old, 40% of them have tried to lose weight, because they are not happy with their bodies. By the time girls reach the age of 17 years old, 78% of them are unhappy with their bodies. More than 8,000,000 people in the United States have an eating disorder, and 90% of those people are women. Those seemed to be some startling facts to me and I have to credit the majority of these awful statistics to the main stream media's misrepresentation of beauty, so I began to ask myself, "Why is it that 'beauty' and appearance are so important?"

It seems to be so important in fact, we risk our health, and money to obtain it. Tanning salons have popped up on every corner, and plastic surgeons are always eager to take new 'patients.' The future growth forecast of the beauty industry is that global sales are expected to exceed more than \$300 billion dollars by 2011. Is it really a necessity to be physically beautiful, or is it just something that we are told that we must "be" or else we won't be accepted?

Honestly, I think that the mind sets we Americans have about this issue are absolutely toxic. By only focusing on ourselves, it

seems that we all have become selfish and inconsiderate as a whole, and if our focus is only on ourselves, how do we expect to ever really be happy in life. There has always got to be more? Right? More weight to lose, more clothes to buy for ourselves, more plastic surgery to have, we are never content and satisfied. When will we wake up and



really see, that the reason we are here is not to "kill" ourselves to become beautiful?

In the popular ABC television show "Extreme Makeover" (2002-2005) contestants considered to be "ugly" got to go on the show and get a complete and extensive make-over completely free of charge. Millions of people eagerly applied to go through the pain and discomfort of several plastic surgeries over a several week period to obtain that dream body they so desperately "needed." However, records indicate that in some cases, when the "new person" came home to their family, because of their sense of vanity and feeling as though they were somehow "better" now, that their marriages shortly ended in divorce. On the other side of the spectrum the contestant suffered from depression, because they were still not

happy with their body image.

After all the research and study I have been doing on this issue, I was reminded of a passage in 1st Peter 3:3-4 (NLT) it says (3) "Don't be concerned about the outward beauty of fancy hairstyles, expensive jewelry, or beautiful clothes. (4) You should clothe yourselves instead with the

if we all took these wise verses to heart.

Dove (soap) has launched a campaign, called Dove's campaign for REAL beauty. I am so happy that they are doing this that I went out and bought all new Dove products, from shampoo to deodorant. I am pleased with them because they have made a pledge not to publish false and unattainable body images to young girls, and they go around the United States and the world, teaching and mentoring girls to realize that they are, in fact, beautiful. Due to the media falsehood, only 2% of the women in the world would even consider themselves as beautiful. So, with companies like Dove refusing to participate in the lies that mainstream media displays, I feel like it is one step closer to opening people's eyes to the fact that just maybe, our way of thinking about beauty has not been completely accurate. I think every girl asks the silent question "do you think I am beautiful?" and I think the best candidate to reassure her is her father.

A father's words in a child's life usually affect them whether they are negative or positive, for the rest of their life. How wonderful would the outcome be if a child heard, "Yes, you are beautiful, and yes you do measure up," since everyday in the media, all they are hearing is, "NO! You do not measure up." To this day, I can't recall one time

A Moment With Mary



by Mary Hunter

that my father has ever called me beautiful. So this "beauty" issue in turn has been a struggle for me, all my life. I believe that girls would be better off receiving reassurance from their parents, that they are enough, and they are accepted and not only that, that they would receive encouragement and teaching of how to be beautiful on the inside. I believe then, we could possibly see harmful statistics like eating disorders, and teen suicides start to decrease.

So, my encouragement to you is that, the next time you may feel as if you don't measure up, or you're just not in that unattainable realm of beauty, relax and realize... It could be possible that beauty may have a larger "Realm" than we think.

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