

Letters to Young People - 'Beauty'

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Today at 3:14pm

When we watch TV, or read a magazine, or see a movie, we can pretty much guarantee we are going to be presented with the image of “a beautiful girl” – probably quite a few of them. When you look at those images side by side, you sometimes get a sense of déjà vu: after a while they all start to look the same. Wind the clock back a few years, and the look is different – the hair, makeup and clothes look different to what you’ll see now. But back then, a lot of those images looked very similar too.

My point here is that the definition of ‘beauty’ that is presented may have altered, but in all cases the fashion industry and media tend to put forward an idea or an image of feminine attractiveness which, we are told, is what ‘beauty’ is all about. Subtly, and sometimes not so subtly, girls and women are told that if they don’t look like these models, then they’re not beautiful.

As a result, a great many women have poor self-esteem as to their physical appearance. People spend thousands on makeup, plastic surgery, implants and who knows what else to try and look like the models in the magazines. Others become depressed, develop eating disorders, and imagine themselves ugly and uninteresting because, in their minds, they are not beautiful, because they don’t look like the girl in the magazine.

But what is beauty really? Is it what the magazines and television tell us? The fact is, not even the models actually look like that. The image you see is Photoshopped, airbrushed, made up, highlighted and much else besides – the image of beauty that is put forward is completely controlled and contrived, and can only exist in controlled and contrived environment of the media, not in real life!

Physical beauty is, in fact, much more diverse than the media portray. What would you think if the media suddenly decided that blue eyes were beautiful but green eyes were not? You’d think they were stupid, right? And you’d be absolutely correct. Fact is, green eyes, blue eyes, brown eyes, and all the other colour eyes are all beautiful. Why then do we accept it if the media say that only a certain style of hair, only a certain body shape, only a certain weight, only a certain shape of eyes or face or cheeks or whatever is beautiful? Really, it’s just as stupid to restrict beauty to a certain look as it is to say only one eye colour is beautiful.

Most importantly, beauty isn’t just physical. Far more important is the type of person you are. The attributes of real beauty aren’t physical attributes at all, but mental ones. If you’re a kind, gentle, compassionate, generous person these things will, in the long run, make much more difference to the people around you, the people you care about and who care about you, than what you looked like. Remember:

... for the LORD sees not as man sees; for man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart (I Samuel 16: 7).

The content of your character is the most beautiful thing about you. When you help your friend who’s feeling down, when you are kind and cheering to the people around you, when your friends know you as loyal and honourable and courageous and true – that is what real beauty is all about.

Girls, don't fall for the media's definition of beauty, because it is a myth. It's harmful, it's dangerous, and it's not even real. You don't look like that because nobody looks like that – and the world would be a poorer place if you all did. You ARE beautiful: right now, as you are. You're cute, funny, sweet, quirky, pretty, charming, inspiring, awesome, brilliant people. No, you're not like the cover of a magazine. You're better. You're real. And you are beautiful.

Gary Young