

Body Image

Lately I have been noticing how people around me, in magazines, and on TV look. I then take a look at myself and I just don't think I measure up. I feel like I don't look good enough and that I need to somehow change how I look in order to look good. I'm so confused, please help.

I am always so amazed at how much our body image affects us. It's hard to believe that 80% of women aren't happy with their body and that 1 million males have eating disorders. It breaks my heart when so many people think that they are ugly or overweight and it brings them down. I get worried when I hear about people struggling with their body image because when people think negatively about their body then those negative thoughts can lead to so many other problems including eating disorders, depression, social problems, and lower confidence levels.

Body image includes many things, such as how we see ourselves, how we think others see us, and how we feel about our body. I believe that it is a mistake to listen to our society and to the media. When we look at magazines, TV shows movies, and other advertisements many times they try to convey a message that says, "How you look is who you are," and, "the most important thing about a person is how they look." Any kind of thought like this is false.

What Hollywood and advertisements don't tell you is that most fashion models are thinner than 98% of American women. They also don't tell you that many models don't even look like their pictures in real life. They use many techniques such as special lighting, computer alterations, and airbrushing to try and make people look perfect. In reality, trying to look like a male or female fashion model is nearly impossible.

More importantly is the fact that how you look is not what people should be using to determine each others or our own importance and worth. We are all made in the image and likeness of God. Isn't that awesome? This fact alone should be reason enough to not judge someone by how they look on the outside and to pay attention to what is on the inside. People can be any shape or size, but whatever someone's shape or size doesn't determine what they are like on the inside.

Don't get me wrong; taking care of our bodies by trying to eat healthy foods and exercising is a great idea. Eating good and exercising can help us feel better and keep us healthy. Taking care of the body that God has given us is important, but who you are on the inside is so incredibly more important. True beauty radiates from the inside out and is not about how we look. Once we convince ourselves that we aren't beautiful, it can be hard to change our minds. But I want you to know that you are beautiful because you were created to be amazingly unique.

Society wants to create a "cookie cutter" image of what people should look like and act like, but I encourage you to celebrate who you are and who God created you to be. Let's face it, a world where everyone looks, acts and thinks the same would be a pretty boring place!

Society's system prides itself on externals. Its determining factors for worth include physical appearance, popularity, power, pleasure, performance, prestige and possessions. This system reduces people to products. Let's demolish the system that elevates external qualities and instead, let's develop self-worth based on internal qualities like character, compassion, commitment, consistency, creativity and charity. Let's create a system based on love which accepts people because of what's on the inside, not what's on the outside.

If you continue to struggle with how you think of your body I encourage you to talk to someone about it. Talking with your parents, a close friend, or youth pastor to share your problems is a great first step.

Articles are written by Bob Lenz, Tiffany Thompson and other national youth communicators with Life Promotions Inc., a non-profit youth organization committed to instilling hope, worth and value in youth.

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