

Ah yes, *beautiful on the inside*. What all women have gloriously aspired to be since we were little girls. In the meanwhile, we're generally more concerned with how we look on the outside. During a conversation yesterday, the topic of the beauty industry's perpetual marketing of supposed imperfection arose. Yes, my coffee companion and I agreed, we are always told there is something we need to change about ourselves in order to look our best...or someone else's version of it. Being a good person will only get you so far in today's world, after all. Being hot will get you farther.

The human race's innate proclivity toward aesthetic appeal and a web of historical and social contexts reinforce the embedded, corporatized beauty standards of the Western world, and elsewhere too. Ok, ok, I know you've read about this topic before, it's almost a cliché the whole "How women are portrayed in the media is so unfair and unrealistic, it gives us poor role models and crushes self-esteem, blah blah blah..." We all know this already; it's important, and we know it, but nothing has really changed. How the beauty industry embraces this collective insecurity, and in some cases obsession, to sell us products is the creepy sub-plot winding underneath it all. I didn't forget about the guys either, they're just another demographic/psychographic category.

Teeth need to be white - but not too white, that Hollywood white is just too obvious. Pale women should tan in order to achieve bronzed, beach-goddess status. Afro-Canadian hair ought to be straightened. "Natural" is in, but not too natural; hair is only acceptable in certain places, after all. Any follicular perpetrators must be shaved, tweezed, waxed or lasered, and if you're brave and aren't worried about the chemicals, maybe even some mysteriously strong smelling depilatory cream might do the trick. Aren't happy with what nature gave you? There are numerous ways to make up for that - coloured contacts, hair dye, eyelash and hair extensions, hell, there are even man-made substances you can inject into different parts of your body to reclaim what you had in your youth or what has always nagged at you about your looks. Don't mind the Health Canada warnings, the company insists these procedures are safe. A corporation wouldn't lie about something that affects your health and safety to protect their profits, would they? You can always "go under the knife," there are reality shows on TV that make this a seemingly acceptable option. Oh yeah, and perhaps most importantly - beauty only comes in sizes 0-8, and generally ages 14-30. Well, at least in the pages of major women's magazines. Women in beauty product advertisements are permanently wrinkle-free and unquestionably living a moneyed, spa-fresh lifestyle. Shouldn't we all be this happy?

We all like to look our best, there's no question about it, but there's something unsettling about a never-ending quest for total perfection. The beauty industry plays this card because it's lucrative - if we're not good enough as we are, we will keep buying in hopes of someday

achieving some ultimate version of ourselves, a version that everyone will love and admire. It goes deeper than beauty, you see, beauty is only skin deep. How we are perceived transcends what we are on the outside; we have practically been trained to assume physical beauty must be equated with goodness, but this is an ugly assumption. When it comes to most of these products, do we even really *need* them? Do the claims on the bottle somehow strike some deep chord within us to “turn back the clock,” are we seeking murmurs from our friends wondering “Maybe she’s born with it...”? Do we choose to buy into it?

It is our responsibility to decide how much we are willing to accept and I think it’s up to us, the people being marketed to, the people working in the industry, everyone, to figure out if this is the kind of society we want to live in, one that turns life into a twisted beauty pageant where no one can ever really win. Beauty is at its most beautiful when it’s not forced, and I don’t think it can be sold over the counter.

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