

My Choice: The Power of Self-Esteem

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EAST TEXAS—"Mirror mirror on the wall, who is the fairest one of all?"

Society's standard for body image and the importance of beauty is promoted everywhere. Beauty is often seen as a symbol of success, love and happiness, yet more often than not it causes pain, loneliness and low self-esteem.

How many times have you heard someone say, "I want to look like that" or "I wish I were as pretty as she is"?

It does not matter where you go, whether to the local mall or your public high school, phrases like this are often heard. Whether we admit it or not, self-esteem affects all of us in one way or another.

I am no exception. When I was 13 years old, I was like any other girl my age. I liked makeup and stylish clothes. I complained about too much homework, and I hated when my little brother ate the last cookie in the box.

I guess I looked like any other girl my age too. I wore jeans and designer T-shirts—the typical junior-high fashion.

However, inside I harbored a secret that made me feel different and weird. From an early age I had been verbally abused by my father. I remember countless times when he would yell at me at dinner for something trivial or tell me I was "ugly" and "worthless." I would end up crying and be unable to eat anything.

It became so bad at one point that I had to go to the doctor because I would get terrible stomachaches and was unable to swallow anything for fear that he would yell at me again.

Eventually my parents divorced and the abuse stopped, but the damage had already been done. Because of the things my dad had said to me, I never saw the pretty young girl with potential that other people saw. Instead, all I saw was ugliness and imperfection.

I would wake up in the morning and wonder what I had done to deserve this face that caused me so much grief.

Everywhere I looked other girls my age were surrounded by friends and laughter. I walked alone through the halls of my school wishing I could be like them.

To make matters worse, I lived in an age when everyone wanted to look like models. Each time someone said something hurtful to me, I would put on a mask and pretend to be someone I was not. I became obsessed with beauty, and in doing so I lost sight of my real self. That was the biggest mistake I ever made.

I am 20 now.

Looking back, I realize that I let people who knew nothing about me decide who I was. I lost sight of the real me, and now my low self-esteem ruled my life. Now that I am older I realize that beauty inside is what counts.

If people were perfect, then they would never be able to learn from their mistakes. And, if people did not learn from their mistakes, they would never realize that all the things they want to be they already are.

We cannot control what happens to us in the strange medley of life. However, we can control how we handle each situation and what we will do with the opportunities presented to us. That is what really counts in the end.