

Life is too short to obsess

What is beauty? I mean really? By whose definition? And if real beauty is something on the inside of us, why are there so many women and girls despising their outsides?

I have not always believed I was beautiful, in fact for more than twenty years I thought I was fat and ugly and a loser. 2006 is my landmark year because this year I have finally won my battle with anorexia.

Since the time I was 12 and started to develop curves I hated the way I looked. I would lie to my parents and find way to pretend to eat without eating. When I was at university I exercised all the time, ate almost nothing and drank about 20 cups of coffee a day – nutritionists everywhere are shuddering as they read that part. I was depressed and felt like a failure a lot, even though I pretended to be happy. I eventually graduated, got a job and even got married.

I have been married for eight and a half years to a wonderful man who has loved and supported me through the worst of this. We have two sons – Aidan who is six and Owen who is three – and both of them keep us very busy.

After each of my pregnancies I felt very depressed because of the extra weight gain. I loved food and hated exercise and was operating on almost no sleep. To top it off Aidan was quite ill until he was about two, so the stress of that didn't help.

I felt guilty because I couldn't find time to get to a gym or do formal exercise – because I thought that I had to. It seemed that every other mom I knew joined a gym as soon as they could and joined Weight Watchers to get back in shape. I did do Weight Watchers for a little bit but I never joined a gym because I could never find the time and I was not about to join a class of "beautiful skinny" women while I was fat and out of shape.

I was exercising by picking up after everyone, cleaning the house, and taking the laundry up and down two flights of stairs. I also walked a lot before I went back to work. This all helped me to lose the forty-five pounds I gained with Owen, but at a size fourteen I still felt fat most of the time and I never wore a bathing suit in public.

I worked hard to lose the weight, so why wasn't I happy? The majority of women in North America are a size fourteen or larger, but I felt like I needed to be "thin" and lose more weight. With all the

diet bars, pills, shakes and plans available that promised to make me look like Kate Moss, there was something wrong with me if I was a size fourteen. Wasn't there?

This past year I saw some of the commercials by Dove and I was amazed – here were women who looked like me and they were beautiful. I suddenly realized that what people had been trying to tell me was true – I was beautiful exactly the way I was. The floodgates of joy and relief opened.

I felt so confident that this summer I actually bought three new bathing suites and I have worn them all in public. My husband has always told me how beautiful I am, but now I actually believe him. The best compliment I got last week was from my boys when they told me I was prettier than Daphne in "Scooby-Doo".

These are the moments to enjoy.

Instead of being angry with myself for not being "thin enough", I was able to direct my anger where it belonged – at the diet and fashion industry. There will always be pressure on women to be thin, but I refuse to buy into it. Other people may look at me and think I'm fat – but I know I'm not. I'm NORMAL. Just think about this: Marilyn Monroe, Jane Russell and Jane Mansfield are probably the most famous sex symbols of our modern age, yet these women were never smaller than a size fourteen. I think of wonderful women like Camryn Manheim, America Ferrera and Melissa McCartney who are beautiful, talented actresses and NOT Barbie dolls. Hooray for them! To be our best we need to love ourselves no matter what.

From my experience, whether a woman is starving herself or stuffing herself, she is feeling emotionally raw and unworthy.

We are all worthy of being loved and we all deserve to feel beautiful, regardless of our dress size or a number on a scale – confidence is a part of true beauty. Deciding to be "more active" is whatever you decide for yourself, and it should be about feeling healthy and energetic and NOT achieving some unrealistic physical ideal. Personally I am too busy being a homework checker, floor sweeper, laundry folder, dinner maker, storyteller and dishwasher to worry about sets and reps at a gym. My life is a gym. Eating healthily is important, but so is indulging once in a while. When I go out for my weekly "Mommy Only" breaks at Chapters I get something rich and chocolaty to eat with my coffee and I enjoy it without any guilt. I have decided that after twenty-two years my life is too short to waste any more time being anorexic.

True beauty is about self-confidence and self-love no matter what our size – I hope more of us learn to embrace this truth.

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