

Culture Bombards Women with Unattainable Images

There is nothing like turning 30 to make you take a long, hard look at your life. For me, and many women, that includes taking a long, hard look at my body. Things have changed. They will continue to change.

After having a child, I'm convinced that some things will never be the same again. If I stare into the mirror long enough, I can amass a simply astounding laundry list of flaws and imperfections.

Oh, I am fairly attached to a few features, but for every one of those there are 10 more that I would happily trade in so I could trade up.

I recently watched a documentary film titled "Miss Representation." The piece takes an honest and heart-breaking look at the way in which the media and rampant consumerism contribute to continued sexism in American culture, focusing on the blatant objectification of women.

With increased accessibility, women (and men) are bombarded with images and rhetoric that defines what is to be "female."

Of course, that definition is narrow and unattainable yet stands as what is not only desired - but also required - of women.

From a disturbingly young age, every mirror culture can provide a woman tells her that it is the shape, size, look, feel, smell and taste of her body that gives her value.

Professional aspirations must be domesticated, attitudes must be subdued and intelligence must be tempered. Dress size and cup size, lips and hips. Less reading, writing and arithmetic, more Cover Girl, Cosmo and Victoria's Secret.

What we are left with is a society falling far from its self-proclaimed values of freedom and equality. As it is pointed out in the film, we trade a society of female presidents, lawyers, priests and business owners for one of nameless, faceless, voiceless victims.

I have also recently spent a fair amount of time studying my wardrobe and, as a result, engaging in some intense “retail therapy.”

There is nothing like turning 30 and once again finding yourself searching for a job to make you take a long, hard look at your body and how you dress it.

Though my personal style has always been fairly modest, I have still found myself on the receiving end of less-than-appropriate comments in the workplace.

Oh, and did I mention my workplace is the church? Yes, congregants are quite capable of reminding this female minister of my body even when my mind is busy doing its job.

Comments like, “Honey, you’re hotter than rocket fuel” leave me wanting to give said congregant a taste of my right hook.

Instead, it often leaves me standing in the dressing room at my favorite boutique fearing labels like “too low cut,” “too much leg,” “too bright” or “too tight.”

What can I walk into that interview wearing that will help them look at me for what I am capable of and who I am called to be?

What can I step into that pulpit wearing that will help them hear my voice and the story I have to tell?

What can I go into that committee meeting wearing that will help them see me as an intelligent and trustworthy leader?

Sadly, these questions are often met by another: What can I wear that will downplay my femininity?

Here is where I take a deep sigh, heavy with frustration, anger and a real sense of loss. You see, I grow weary of wondering what is comparable in my wardrobe to my male counterpart’s suit and tie or the standard khakis and polo shirt.

I get angry at the thought that I cannot look like myself, like a woman, when I walk into a congregation as their pastor.

I feel lost when I am told that my blonde, petite and fair-skinned body doesn’t match my low and loud voice or my driven and determined personality.

Where and when does it stop?

Perhaps, in the dressing room, perhaps in the pulpit. Perhaps, more rightly, in the pews.

All I know is that this woman is a woman - my kind, and only my kind. For president or priest, mother or maid, sinner or saint - that will have to be enough.

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