

Lesson:
Beauty
(Adapted from SDCOE)

Length of lesson:
30-45 Minutes

Materials:

- Pens and pencils
- Small pieces of paper, 3 per participant
- Small bowl
- Pictures of examples of plastic surgery or “Photo shopped” images

Discussion Summary:

Unrealistic and unhealthy body expectations, including “ideal” sizes, weights, abilities, and physical attributes, influence girls’ understandings of what is beautiful. Body image, or how one views one’s own body, is an essential element of self-esteem: in general, those who view their bodies positively have higher self-esteem than those who view their bodies negatively. Girls ages 8 to 15 are at an age in which their minds and bodies are changing and developing: body hair begins to grow, menstrual cycles begin to flow, and hormones influence emotions. Standards of “normal” and “beautiful” put forward by the media, parents, peers, and society at large (i.e. thin body, small clothing size, large breasts, no hair except on your head) mean that girls at this age often feel pressured to look a certain way. This pressure sadly manifests as low self-esteem, eating disorders, desire for plastic surgery, self-mutilation, and bullying or aggression. The average age at which girls begin dieting, Baeza notes, is nine-years-old (Baeza 1). Although beauty is ultimately subjective, escape from the pressure to attempt to conform to these bodily expectations is challenging. Encouraging girls to accept and appreciate their bodies as they are, expanding the definition of beauty and recognizing beauty everywhere, providing opportunities for a variety of physical activities, discussing healthy eating habits, providing healthy snacks and meals, teaching girls how to give and receive compliments, deconstructing media images, and presenting positive role models who embody a variety of sizes, weights, abilities, and appearances are effective strategies for promoting self-esteem and positive body-image.

Discussion Question:

- **What is beauty?**

1. Pass out three small pieces of paper to each participant. Ask participants, without discussing, to write down their answer to this question: what do you see or feel about your body when you look in the mirror? Tell them their answers are anonymous.

2. Have them fold their papers in half and drop them in the bowl.

3. Explain that you will draw each paper out of the bowl, read it out loud, and then they will have to decide if the comment on the paper is positive, negative, or somewhere in the middle. For example, if a paper says, “fat thighs” or “ugly face” you would put it in the negative pile. If a paper says, “strong arms” or “pretty face” you would put it in the positive pile. If a paper says, “tall” or “long hair” you would put it in the neutral pile.

4. When all the papers are sorted, ask participants to check and see which pile

is the biggest. Was it the negative pile? Ask participants why they are so critical of themselves and where they think that comes from.

5. Now ask participants to name things that are beautiful. Ask them to explain what makes that thing or person beautiful. Examples include: sunset, [name of celebrity], my mom, the clouds in the sky, a necklace, the ocean, someone being kind to someone else, and someone singing.

6. Remind participants of the variety of things they just identified as beautiful. Lead a discussion based on the following questions: What makes someone or something beautiful? Who decides what or who is beautiful? Does everyone see the same things as beautiful (is beauty objective or subjective)? Ask them why they might not have included themselves on that list of things that are beautiful. Do you really believe you are not beautiful? Is beauty on the inside or the outside or both? Is there a difference between bragging and being proud of yourself? Is looking “perfect” the same as being beautiful? Ask for examples of ways people can be beautiful. Ask them to expand their definition of beauty beyond how something looks and if it is popular.

7. After the discussion, have participants turned to a neighbor and say three things they think are beautiful about themselves. Then have them turn to another neighbor and tell that neighbor three things they think are beautiful about that person. They can say elements of inner beauty or outer beauty or a combination of both.

8. Finish the lesson by telling all participants that they are beautiful! Remind them that you see how smart, unique, and creative they all are and that that makes them beautiful to you. Remind them to be confident in themselves and that loving yourself for exactly who you are at this moment is what is beautiful.