

# Beauty Redefined, Episode 68



**Power of Moms**  
A Gathering Place for Deliberate Mothers

April Perry and Lindsay Kite of [beautyredefined.net](http://beautyredefined.net) discuss how the website came about and how we deliberate mothers can redefine beauty.

Lindsay and her twin sister, Lexi, both became interested in studying how the media portrays women in separate Media Studies classes their Freshman year of college in 2003. Later, they co-authored a Master's study about media literacy, and now both are pursuing PhDs on the subject. They began their website [beautyredefined.net](http://beautyredefined.net) to help educate others on how to process media messages and to help women "reclaim beauty".

When April asked Lindsay to describe how the media distorts beauty, Lindsay pointed out that we are surrounded by media – especially TV – 24 hours a day. Billboards, radio, newsstands, magazines, the internet, ads on the street, popular images and ideas, and TV programs and commercials all influence us, and they are everywhere. The media image of women is that they are all about their body, and the body they are portraying is very thin, young, tall, and white. These are one-dimensional images that register as "the new normal." These images are profitable because they portray ideals that look attainable, but are actually unrealistic, so we spend our time and money trying to reach that ideal and come back again and again to fads and products that promise to help us achieve it.

Lindsay says that these images of women promote **objectification**, or viewing ourselves as objects. For example, Lindsay describes two different women who cross a busy intersection. A non-self-objectifying woman notices all the cars, how nice the day is, all the colors around her, and her destination ahead. A self-objectifying woman, on the other hand, walks across the street and is constantly thinking about how she looks: she fixes her clothes, wonders how she looks from behind, how she looks to the stalled cars on each side of her, fixes her hair, perhaps notices her shadow and thinks it doesn't look good enough, etc. April points out that it's the same thing when you pass your reflection in a window and immediately notice a flaw and send yourself a negative message.

Advertisers defend themselves by saying that "everyone wants to see a fantasy in media and no one would watch the show or pick up the magazine if these images weren't used." Lindsay says that this is actually not true. Recent studies show that women are more likely to buy into a product advertised by a woman who looks like them. April adds that she finds when she's completely honest in her posts about her "flaws" or "failures" she actually gets more emails and comments from people relating to her because they see her as normal and human.

When women view themselves as objects and are focused on how their body looks all the time, it is like splitting that woman in two. Deliberate mothers want to care for their children and about their own living and growing and thriving, and they can't do that if we're also worrying "if our eyelashes are thick enough or our lips are full enough." Image anxiety can hold us back from doing things we love (think getting in a swimsuit to play with your kids) because we think people are noticing so many things about us, when in reality they notice very little.

This objectification can be especially hard on mothers. Motherhood changes your body! We expand to make room for baby, we give birth, we nurse, we intake so many calories to support that extra life, our time and energy are spent on more than just ourselves, and this all takes a toll on our bodies. Giving birth is never glamorized in media. Stretch marks and stretched-out stomachs are never shown. Articles in parenting magazines advertise ways to "Get back in your skinny jeans in just six weeks" or to "Get your body back after baby". Because bodies do not match the image they "should," so many mothers view their bodies negatively.

Instead, shouldn't a mother look at her body and recognize how wonderful it is? Isn't it miraculous that your body was able to carry and deliver a baby? Isn't it incredible that your body provides all that is needed to sustain that baby's life? Isn't it wonderful that you have feet to walk you to your child, arms to wrap around them, eyes to see them, and hands to hold them? The media never focuses on these messages. They only focus on added pounds or bags under your eyes, not the wonderful things those qualities bear testimony to.

Of course we need to find a balance in nutrition and exercise and taking care of ourselves, but the message we are usually given is that if we are disgusted enough by our body we will be motivated to change it. Lindsay claims that is actually the opposite of the truth. If we feel bad or disgusted about our body, we will make poor choices. We won't feel like exercising, even to just walk around the block, or eating a nutritious meal. On the other hand, if we feel good about our body we will be motivated to take care of it. To battle this mindset, Lindsay suggests focusing on telling yourself how much you appreciate your body and love yourself. Notice all the wonderful things your body does. Notice the things you love about your body and the things that make you feel beautiful and alive. You will naturally be motivated to exercise, eat nutritious food, and practice joyful living, and you won't be so wrapped up in how your body looks.

So what can we do to lessen the influence of media imagery in our homes for both ourselves and our children? Lindsay says there are a multitude of strategies on her website, but she specifically mentions the following:

- Recognize harmful ideas and messages as you see them and immediately reject them. Think about where those ideals are coming from, why they are engineered the way they are and what they're meant to do. (This is called **media literacy**.)
- Stop sending yourself negative messages! Lindsay started practicing this as a teenager. She noticed that her friends, mom, and women everywhere were talking negatively about their bodies all the time. She decided she wanted to stop that negative talk, so she made a vow never

to put herself down out loud. Eventually, she became uncomfortable even saying those things in her head. Stop policing what other women look like as well. Our daughters and friends will notice and reflect our behavior. Set a good example of health and positive body image as a mom (for both your daughters *and* your sons!).

- Make your home a safe place where you do not draw attention to looks. (Your looks, your children's looks, your neighbor's looks, etc.) Other sources will provide plenty of that; in your home, focus on being and doing more than on 'looking'.
- Set nutrition and fitness goals for yourself and with your kids. We often feel like how a person looks tells us how fit they are, but really their health and fitness all relies on how they live, not how they look. We can reset the way we think about our bodies by focusing on true health and fitness instead of outward appearance.
- Go on a media fast! Take some time off from the media so that you can become re-sensitized to messages and images. Take off as much time as you can (a week? A month?) Try to do it as a whole family. Stop subscribing to magazines that portray people poorly and be selective about TV shows and other sources of media in the home.
- Be a media instructor for your children. View media together and ask them "why" questions to help them think about why producers are choosing to portray things certain ways. (Why do you think they dressed that mom that way? Why do you think they're only showing people from the shoulders down on that clothing commercial?) If your children share negative feelings about their bodies, be honest and share your own struggles with them. The truth of your words will resonate and they will feel open to discussing their feelings with you.

Deliberate mothers are a community of women who are literally raising the next generation. We have a huge capacity to influence them. Being smart about how we view media and rejecting harmful messages can help us and our children recognize that our worth does not rely on our outward image. We can raise children who do not buy into this idea! We don't have to be discouraged about how widespread this message is because our families have the ability to choose to recognize and reject those ideals. Our living reality is so much more beautiful than the fantasy they put into our heads.

Question: What is one thing you can do to move yourself to a healthy image of your own body and pass that on to your children?

*Transcribed by Cami Reschke*