



The Eye of the Beholder

FOUR POWERFUL WOMEN
AND ONE AMAZING LITTLE GIRL
SHARE WHY SELF-LOVE IS SO
IMPORTANT NO MATTER HOW
VISIBLE OUR DIFFERENCES

BY NYKIA SPRADLEY

BEAUTY

Ava Clarke & Shala Edney

"God made all of us different on the outside, but we are all the same kind of beautiful on the inside." —AVA CLARKE

Ages: 8 and 41
Location: Mississippi
Occupations: Student, actor and model; radiation safety officer

On celebrating beauty...

Ava: Beauty is accepting your unique self...and being happy with the way God made you.
Shala: My daughter Ava is wise beyond her eight years. We've done lots of research together on albinism. We have always told Ava that she was born different to make a difference in the world. By definition *albinism* is a flaw because the DNA strand does not create enough melanin. I would categorize albinism as the perfect "flaw."

On shaking off the critics...

Shala: I worry about Ava feeling comfortable around her peers and finding friends in school. I worry about her features being "too White" for African-American groups and "too Black" for Caucasians. People point and stare all the time. Over the years I've learned that most of them are simply curious.
Ava: When I'm with my friends, I feel like a regular girl who's just like them. I believe God made me different so I can make a change in others.

On self-acceptance and embracing our differences...

Ava: Even though I have a different skin and hair color, I'm proud of who I am and how I look.
Shala: Find strength and peace in knowing you can't change your skin color or your eyes or people's curious gazes. We are all created for a purpose. We are all beautiful.



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Beauty is accepting your unique self...and being happy with the way God made you.”

—AVA CLARKE

MILL STERLING

Jessamyn Stanley

"Often what we perceive as 'flaws' are the characteristics that distinguish us from other people. It's important to acknowledge all our characteristics as essential pieces of who we are, even if it's necessary for us to let go of them in order to grow."

Age: 29
Location: Durham, NC
Occupation: Yoga teacher and writer

On celebrating beauty...

I honor my body by taking care of it—allowing it to sweat, breathe and recover. The more I do that, the more my body is able to serve me and those around me. Beauty can only result from wellness.

On shaking off the critics...

We live in an ego-driven and body-obsessed society. I think my perspective would be more "normal" if human beings could look beyond the physical. Body shaming is the result of low self-esteem and a bad self-image. It's weak and pathetic. People who engage in body shaming are merely showcasing their own bad self-image to the rest of the world.

On self-acceptance and embracing our differences...

Yoga has helped me realize that my ego is the number one thing that doesn't serve my overall well-being. By practicing yoga I release my ego and can let go of the expectations I set for myself. As a result I have become stronger and more powerful and capable of striding further in life than I've ever imagined.

Stanley is the author of the forthcoming book Every Body Yoga: Let Go of Fear, Get on the Mat, Love Your Body (Workman Publishing Co.), due out April 2017. »



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The more I celebrate my body, the more it's able to serve me and those around me.”

CHRISTINE HEWITT/EVERY BODY YOGA/WORKMAN PUBLISHING CO.



Nikia Phoenix

"My freckles should never be associated with the word flaw. They are unique, quirky, cute, sexy, fun and inspiring—not flawed."

Age: 36
Location: Los Angeles
Occupation: Model and creator of Black Girl Beautiful

On celebrating beauty...

It's what's underneath your skin. It's the depth of your soul. Beauty is the compassion you show others even when you may not be feeling your best. Beauty is more of an energy than an aesthetic.

On shaking off the critics...

Kids used to pick on me when I barely had a sprinkle on my face. They treated me as if I had a disease, and nothing could change their minds. They feared and teased me. Outside my family, I felt alienated. I must tell myself every day that I am beautiful and own that truth or else I will turn back into being that scared child I once was.

On self-acceptance and embracing our differences...

I don't hide my freckles—what you see is what you get. My mom and I talked about our journeys to self-acceptance, and I think she realized that she still had some healing to do, because she witnessed me going through the same ridicule she'd experienced. We are almost mirror images of each other, so this process of self-love is more like group therapy. Black woman, you are a blessing. Own your truth and declare your own beauty. You don't have to pick and choose which parts of you to love. Love every single microscopic dot of you just as you are right now.

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 you are a blessing.
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BRANDON ESPY



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LIFE IN REVERIE/©LIFE IN REVERIE

Mama Cax

"You have only one body, so cherish it. If you learn to accept it the way it is and embrace any changes that come naturally, you will love your body forever. I have to adapt to my environment, but I do everything that everyone else does."

Age: 27
Location: New York City
Occupation: Blogger, model, graduate student and body positive advocate

On celebrating beauty...

As cliché as it may sound, beauty is a combination of the external and the internal. There's nothing more beautiful than kindness and confidence. I also think comfort has a lot to do with beauty. I feel the most beautiful when I'm comfortable.

On shaking off the critics...

After my amputation I was still chasing this unattainable image of beauty. I think my perception changed when I saw that other people wanted to alter something about themselves: butt size, weight and so on. This makes you realize something can't be wrong with everyone—the problem is the beauty standard. I surround myself with people who not only love themselves but also encourage me to do the same. I used to be worried about how people perceived me. But not anymore. I exude confidence, and that's what they see.

On self-acceptance and embracing our differences...

What you have may not be celebrated in magazines, but you should still love it. I know it's easy to say, "Just love what you have," but essentially that's what it comes down to. I've been able to find self-love in my hobbies, travels and exercise. Walking fast to catch a train just two minutes before departure, rock climbing, holding on to that last breath to complete a lap—these things make me appreciate my body's endurance and my accomplishments. That appreciation is enough to love my body no matter what society deems as flaws.