

MODULE 5

Class Title: Perception of Beauty

Aim of the lesson: To see how “beauty” is defined by media, manifests in pop culture & effects our perception of ourselves

Category: Popular Culture

Lesson format: Power point presentation with narration & discussion

Handout: Real Beauty (attached)

(Greeting to students) *Assalam alaikum wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatuh*

(*Ta'awwudh*) *Aoodhubillahi min AsShaytanir Rajeem*

(*Tasmiyah*) *Bismillahir Rahmanir Raheem*

(*Du'a*) *Rabbish rahli sadri wa yassirli amri wahlul uqdatum millisani yafqahu qawli* (Surah At Ta-Ha 20: Verse 25-28)

Slide 1:

Be honest. How many times have you stood in front of the mirror and said, “Hey, I look cool today.” Come on, be honest. Ok, I am going to raise *my* hand.

Have you said to yourself, “Oh my God! My *naak* (nose) is too *mota* (fat)” and “What is the matter with my hair? It is so frizzy it doesn’t get straight!” And yes, sometimes you are like “Oh, I so need to lose weight!” We do that, don’t we?

Slide 2:

Forget about other people checking us out, we check ourselves out so much. I mean “Mirror, mirror on the wall, who’s the fairest of them all?” Has anyone actually said that standing in front of a mirror? Come on be honest. No? But we say worse than that, don’t we?

(Teacher demonstrating to the students): Standing like this – and then like this in front of a full length mirror.

Have you noticed that whenever we pass in front of a mirror – or any shiny surface – we do a little checking out ourselves bit. We all do that, and if somebody tells you, “NO I don’t!” then they are lying. That is all there is to it.

Slide 3:

Allah (swt) tells us in Surah Al Mo’min, 40: Verse 64

‘It is Allah Who has made for you the earth as a resting place and the sky as a canopy and has given you shapes and made your shapes beautiful’

Allah (swt) is not saying that I have made *Ashwariya Rai* & *Julia Roberts* beautiful and nobody else. He is saying: made *your* shapes beautiful... *fa ahsana suwarakum* (Surah Al Mo’min 40: verse 64)

He is talking about all of us, each and every one of us, with our *moti naak* (fat nose) and *terhay hont* (crooked lips) and everything! Allah (swt) has made each and every individual human being beautiful.

And, “He has provided for you Sustenance of things pure and good such is Allah your Lord. So Glory to Allah the Lord of the Worlds” (Surah Al Mo’min 40: verse 64)

It is a beautiful verse, isn’t it? Allah (swt) has made our faces, and He has made them beautiful. Period. Alas! Our perception of ‘beauty’ or ‘beautiful’ is other than what Allah (swt) is telling us.

Slide 4:

I think my perception of beauty is not that every time I look at myself in the mirror, I say, “ Oh yes... pretty girl”, I don’t do that ...I am always like: “ My hair is frizzing up!” and “Oh my God, ever since I stopped doing my eyebrows, look at them, they look awful!” and “Look at this pimple here!” and “What do I do about this?” and “A double chin is coming up” and whatever.

Slide 5:

Our perception of ‘beautiful’, unfortunately, is based on “fair and lovely”. You know if you are dark skinned, then it is like death in our culture...forget about getting a “good catch.”

“What is the matter with this one’s skin colour? I don’t see anything wrong with it ..What is the matter with this one? She is air brushed anyway!”

And it happens to everyone. There is this girl, who comes to my house, and she was looking quite nice and I told her that. You know what she said? “*Baji*, I have been using ‘Fair and Lovely’ that is why” and she was so thrilled, actually thrilled! I just want you to think about it - the concept of ‘*fair and lovely*’.

Slide 6:

Skinnyyyy....

Gosh, people like me should just go and jump out of the window. Seriously, seriously ...we have no place on this planet anymore... us fat people you know, simple as that! Forget it! The first thing people say on meeting you after a bit is: “You have put on weight” “My God! Is that your bum or what?” excuse me – how rude is that!

Skinny! I mean this is not real!! How can anyone be so skinny? This is not real! How can anyone be that thin? Even the thinnest of you is not *that* skinny?

Slide 7:

If the definition of ‘beautiful’ gets any thinner no one will fit.

Slides 8-10:

I need to have a brownie all of a sudden, thinking about all these thin things. Unfortunately if these are our holy books, and this is where we are getting the idea of beauty from, it seems as if the whole world is full of these pretty people. The whole world is full of these beautiful people and it pays off. It is paying off! All eyes are on the stage. Smile! You are beautiful! Everyone is so pretty around you.

Slide 11:

If you look at all the glossy magazines and the television, you think, “Hello! Am I the only ugly duckling around here?” What is the matter? Don’t say that you have never thought that. The other day I saw some fabric company’s catalogue, and I thought, “Are these for real?”

And do you know there is a research done, where they have found out that women who look at a glossy magazine for three minutes or so, they actually get depressed! They *actually* get depressed and they have negative body image of themselves. Can you imagine?

And you see, it is paying off! You see these fabulous models, these fabulous actresses, walking down the red carpet to get one award after another. The salaries! Uhh, I don’t know how many million dollars for one photo shoot or movie? And why? Because they can act well? Hello, give me a break here. How many ugly and fat actors/actresses make a lot of money or are on the cover of magazines?

What we see around us is, that beauty reigns, beauty rules, and what kind of beauty? ‘Beauty’ that is defined by someone else - standards of beauty that are set by someone else.

Slide 12:

And then we look at ourselves in the mirror. And ugh, we scream, “Help me! Help me! Help me! What should I do?” And we go out, and we get all the right products and we fix up ourselves real pretty.

By the way, the other day someone was telling me that I am such a loser because I don’t know what Mac cosmetics is! I just found out last week. You also don’t know what it is? Thank God for that. How many of you don’t know about Mac cosmetics? Yes! We can make a group on facebook - don’t know Mac and proud of it!

Someone was wearing a cool orange coloured lipstick and I love, bright lipsticks so I asked her which one it is, and she told me, “Oh Mac”, and I am like, she is talking Latin, and she was so sad to hear that I was so unfortunate and illiterate.

So anyway, we fix ourselves so very pretty, because obviously we want to look like Angelina Jolie. Who would not want to? She is married to Brad Pitt for God’s sake.

Slide 13:

You do have some type of a beauty image in your mind about yourself. There is nothing wrong with fixing yourself up pretty, but then I think, oh my God I have to hide all that behind layers of cloth! All my Mac makeup and my pretty pretty clothes and the lovely big lashes that I am going to bat around, and then *Amma* (mom) is going to say, “*where are you going like that?*”

So what now? Do I just cover myself up?

Slides 14-15:

Let us just look at real beauty for a change. Let’s remove the layers of makeup and hours of fixing up and let’s see what celebrities truly look like.

Whenever we talk about celebrities, we talk about people who are famous. Right? The purpose is not to make fun of them, the purpose is not to undermine them as people, the purpose is to get a lesson from them! Please remember that, because *hidayah* is from Allah(swt). Who gets *hidayah* when? We don’t know that. So it is not for us to judge people, whether it is *Aishwariya Rai* or Brad Pitt, or whoever! We do sometimes tend to do that, but the purpose here is not to make fun but to learn a lesson. Let’s be on the same page on that one.

So just look at the pictures. I don’t even have to say anything before and after.

Slides 16-24:

Oh! She comes on that TV show, what is the name of that TV show? ‘*Will and Grace*’? yeah.

I mean, I was shocked when I saw this one.

Drew Barrymore.

Julia Roberts, she is not nice looking?

She does not look that bad, so this picture is air brushed as well.

No? Oh you can do wonders with ‘*Photoshop*’!

Student: “She looks scary.”

Oh, you think she looks scary, but a lot of people don’t.

She looks good with or without make-up; she is not that bad either.

She probably woke up in the morning and someone clicked her.

Slides 25-27:

Yeah, that is an ad for a concealer. You are right, but just see, she is not that bad either, but the thing is, do this and this, look the same. Just see what happens later on. This is the miracle of '*Photoshop*' that I want to show you. And obviously, you can see these 'before' and 'after' pictures. Let's be honest here, it's quite possible that this one is fixed as well! So that they are trying to make the 'before' pictures look really horrid. That possibility is always there.

Slides 28-29:

Ok, Angelina Jolie is too beautiful to be called ugly.

Slides 30-31:

What is the deception behind all of this?

Slides 32-41:

Uh, just watch...pretty pretty picture on the cover of a magazine. '*Photoshop*' in action! See that? And this is not bad looking either! Actually to be honest, this is not bad, but look at that. Flawless, this is flawless. Isn't it? Look at that, look at this one, look at all the lines gone! It's absolutely flawless.

Miracle of '*Photoshop*' is, that it makes a pretty 'ok' person, look 'drop dead gorgeous'. I mean, this is amazing. Look at her skin here, and look at her skin over here. What I am trying to show you all here is, these women are quite pretty anyways, it is not as if they are ugly looking or anything, but I mean, look this is perfection.

Slide 42:

This is a picture you see in a magazine after it has been touched up. This is a tutorial for '*Photoshop*'. You see what they have tried to do? This is the same face they tried to change over. Have any of you used '*Photoshop*' or some other program you can do wonders with? You can actually make someone look completely different.

Slides 43-44:

Hey, by the way, they do not leave shoes alone either! Look at that, they do it to products as well. So you see; a lot of us get the idea of what is 'pretty' just right out of a magazine or from a theatre screen. Particularly on the cinema screen, in that 35mm screen it is larger than life isn't it? So their complexion and everything about them is flawless! Doesn't it look absolutely flawless? And YOU don't!

Slides 45-46:

But majority of the time when you see really flawless complexions and you wonder, how does this happen? So this is how it really happens. I want you guys to watch this. Have you seen this dove clip? What they have shown in this little clip is, that this is a model; who again, is not that bad looking, and then she becomes this person, this Barbie doll thing. And the thing is, that can you guess what is going to happen? I mean you guys are pretty average intelligent kids. Do you consider yourself 'average intelligent'? Or a little 'not so dumb'? Great, you are 'not so dumb' kids here therefore most of you probably do realize consciously, that this is not real. 'This' is what she looks like and what I see on the billboard is 'that' and that is not real. Yeah, you might rationalize it, but you know that '*click*' thing happens in your head. **You** know pretty well, but there are millions and millions and millions of people who don't know that. Who don't think in those terms, who just look at a picture and that image has such a profound effect on them. Even on you, it really does! Even though you know the reality behind it, it still has a profound effect on your psyche. And you say, like, "Okay, there is something wrong with me!"

Student: "Some people do look like that in real life"

Teacher: Absolutely! Some people look exceptionally beautiful because Allah (swt) has made them exceptionally beautiful.

The point is not that there are no beautiful people in this world, I mean, when I say 'beautiful' I mean all of you are beautiful and I think, I am very beautiful and I think everyone around here is beautiful, and the reason I think that is because Allah (swt) has said so in Surah Al Mo'min: and made your shapes beautiful, That is it! And I take that one very personally. So the thing is, that everyone is beautiful, and I agree with you that there certain people who are gorgeous. Because Allah (swt) has given them that special something. Sometimes you really can't pin point exactly what it is. So it is there, yes absolutely, the point is not that beauty does not exist, beauty exists. The point is, that this *perfection* thing that we are after, which we think is 'beautiful' and the standard of 36 -24-36. I don't know if that still exists, but now it is size zero, size two, which is like, please give me a break! It is unreal, and you see the problem is, that when you do get that size, you want to show it off. Because when you are looking *that* pretty, you don't want to cover it all up. Ok, so all dressed up and nowhere to go. That is the problem. That is the problem with this beauty myth that we have, that we just get swamped into it in such a way that it does not end.

Slide 47:

I mean the products that we buy, wow! The amount of cosmetics and creams and this and that and the so & so designer clothes and the rat race. That happens. Beauty or death. That is the problem. Even though you know the reality behind the images, you still want to be *that* beautiful.

Slide 48:

And a lot of times pretty 'level headed' kids like you get into all these sorts of problems. Eating disorders, anorexia, low self-esteem, depression, desperate measures, even plastic surgery. Regular people do that; don't think that you guys are some where beyond this.

Student: "Plastic surgery is not allowed. Right?"

Teacher: Yes, cosmetic surgery is not allowed in Islam.

Student: but if you have a really bad accident or you got burned, can that be operated on?

Teacher: there is a difference between reconstruction surgery and just getting a nose job done. Cosmetic surgery just for the purpose of beautifying yourself is not allowed.

Student: I heard you are not allowed to pluck your eyebrows?

Teacher: that's right, because you are changing the shape of what Allah (swt) has made. If a situation for reconstruction surgery arises, then the best thing to do is to talk to a person who is very well versed in Islamic law and ask them and they will give you an appropriate reply. Those people advise you on the matters of legality, whether this is allowed or that is allowed.

Ok. So the whole idea is, when we are looking at all these images and all these pictures and all these glossy, glossy, pretty, pretty things, the possibility of us getting into this trap of eating disorders and stuff is very much there.

Slide 49:

This is a picture of Donatella Versace's daughter. I mean can you imagine that she inherited 300 million pounds of the Versace Empire and she has to be fed food through a tube, because she is fighting anorexia and has to be force-fed.

Slide 50:

Nip and tuck, hide what you can, change what you can't hide.

Slide 51:

You know this is just sad. This is a weird headdress which if you wear, will help remove and stop wrinkles from appearing. Droop Defeater - Eliminates droop in upper eyelids. Position the Envisage resisters on the outer edge of the eyebrows. Pull forehead muscles up to top of head to contract. Feel a mild tension from the Envisage resisters Hold for a count of five seconds, then release. Repeat 10-15 times.

And you know these are the products that are actually available and these are the things that people go through, go through extremes to look a certain way, so that I don't have a wrinkle on my face. Oh my God! I don't want wrinkles on my face!

Slide 52:

Exercise for the face is fine, it's ok, but being so excessive about it that you will go through like that.

Slide 53:

You want to have a long neck? Put this contraption on over here and pump air and keep wearing it like that. Neck stretcher. Simply place around the neck and then use the hand pump to send air rushing through the tube. You're supposed to feel a nice "refreshing sensation" as the pressure slowly stretches the back of your neck –if you kill yourself by mistake, at least you'll be looking "refreshed" when they find you.

Slide 54:

What is this for? This crazy product not only makes you look like something from a horror movie, but slims your face using contact pressure and doubles as a sauna to sweat the fat away.

This is a face mask to keep the skin tight and taut and wrinkle-free. You wear this thing and it is like a facelift kind of thing.

Slides 55-57:

Next level of 'crazy' is plastic surgery. If people are willing to suffer serious pain and God knows what not for the sake of fake beauty, then that says a lot about how insecure women and girls have become about themselves and have fallen into the trap of 'looking' a certain way.

Slide 58:

Look at this girl, she is 28 years old and has had 26 plastic surgeries done! Pretty girl huh? 26 plastic surgeries, and this is what she looks like now. Allah's creation, and *then* see what happens.

Jenny is only 28 years old and has already had 26 plastic surgeries. Jenny says she first became a slave to the scalpel after one critical comment from her then husband. "My ex-husband told me that my nose was too big, that my boobs were too small, so eventually I got a boob job to stop the comments," Jenny says. "I just moved from a bad relationship with him to a bad relationship between me and my reflection. After the divorce, plastic surgery became an obsession for me."

Jenny was just 25 years old when she had a brow lift. She's also had Botox, cheek implants, three nose jobs, veneers on her teeth, three lip implants, two boob jobs, three breast lifts, and

liposuction on her arms, stomach, hips, thighs, and knees. Jenny says that the total cost of her plastic surgeries is about \$80,000.

Slide 59:

Oh you haven't seen anything yet.

Sometimes plastic surgeries go horribly wrong, don't they?

Slide 60:

Allah (swt) says in Surah Al-Infitar 82: Verse 7- 8

"Who created you and fashioned you perfectly and gave you in due proportion in whatever form you will He put you together"

If He gave you thick eyebrows you have thick eyebrows, if He gave you perfectly arched eyebrows then you have perfectly arched eyebrows, if He gave you eyebrows that were a little straight, you know, then that is the way you have them. So He has made everybody's bodies different. Everybody's faces different. Some people have big eyes, some people have *chinky* *chinky* eyes. Allah (swt) has made them and because He has made them they are beautiful. That is the whole point.

Slide 61:

The Prophet (pbuh) said, "Indeed Allah does not look at your faces or your wealth instead He looks at your hearts and your deeds." [Muslim]

Slide 62:

You see, the applause dies and the crown goes to someone else and we are just left with ourselves, not our appearance. And today's glossy magazine is tomorrow's *raddi* (trash) you know what *Raddi* is? It means trash. All those designers' catalogues, and then six months down the line you just throw them out. Not even six months, just a couple of months and they are gone, finished, no one remembers them anymore.

Slide 63:

Can anyone of you name the last five winners of the Miss Universe contest?

Students: no

Teacher: Name the last half dozen academy award winners for best actors and actresses?

Students: Sandra Bullock I think was one.

Sandra Bullock. Who else? But I mean does that matter? Do you actually remember these things? Yeh?

Slide 64:

How many of you can name three friends who have helped you through a difficult time?

How many of you can name five people who have taught you something worthwhile?

How many of you can think of a few people who have made you feel appreciated and special?

And How many of you can think of five people you have enjoyed spending time with?

You see these are the important things in life and they have nothing to do with if you have thick eyebrows or bushy eyebrows or whether you look like a man, or a goat for that matter! To be honest, it has nothing to do with what you look like or how much you weigh.

The point that I am making is: it really doesn't matter what you look like. Allah (swt) has made us all beautiful. Just the fact that the Master and Lord of the universes has created me and you with His hands. What an honour. When we were in our mothers' wombs, **He** fashioned our features, **He** made our complexions, **He** carved out our body shape – *Alhamdulillah*.

Slide 65:

He has created the heavens and the earth with truth, And He shaped you and made good your shapes. And to Him is the final return. (Surah At Taghabun 64: Verse 3)

Did you guys know that Allah (swt) has talked about creating us beautiful in several places in the Qur'an? We have seen 3 different verses today.

Why do we allow ourselves to fall in this beauty myth trap? We **know** no real human being looks like the actresses on screen or models in the glossies – we **know** airbrushed images stare from billboards – we **know** advertisers are out to sell their product that is why they want us to believe that “fair” is “lovely.” We **know** that the “fashion industry” is one big 3 ring circus.

We know all this, don't we? you “not-so-dumb” pretty cool girls. So next time you look into that mirror – instead of asking – mirror mirror on the wall, who is the fairest of them all? Check this out.

Slide 66:

Prophet (pbuh) gave us this lovely *du'a* to say for when we look in the mirror.

Allahumma kama hassanta khalaqee fa hassin khuluqee

'O' Allah, make my character beautiful, like You have made my face beautiful.' (Ibn Hibban)

Du'a for end of a gathering) *Subhana Rabbika Rabbul Izzati 'amma yasifun wa salamun 'alal mursaleen, walhamdulillahi Rabbil 'alameen*

(Parting salutation to students) *Assalam alaikum wa rahmatullahi wa Barakatuh*

REFERENCE:

The Beauty Myth: How images of beauty are used against women, Naomi Wolf, Perennial an imprint of HarperCollins publishers, ISBN 0-06-051218-0