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# Never Too Young? Misleading Our Girls About Beauty

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Here is yet another sign of the times. *The New York Times* reports that even the youngest of girls are being targeted as consumers of cosmetics and beauty treatments. The elementary set is showing up in trendy salons for pedicures and manicures. As the paper reports:

*Traditionally, young girls have played with unattended M.A.C. eye shadow or Chanel foundation, hoping to capture a whiff of sophistication. In the recent past, young girls have also tagged along on beauty expeditions by their mothers and teenage sisters.*

*But today, cosmetic companies and retailers increasingly aim their sophisticated products and service packages squarely at 6- to 9-year-olds, who are being transformed into savvy beauty consumers before they're out of elementary school.*

The idea of young girls as “savvy beauty consumers” is inherently troubling. But marketers refer to 6-to-9-year-olds as a “starter market.” Television shows like “America’s Next Top Model” have become a fascination and aspiration for many young girls.

More:

*Reality programming like “America’s Next Top Model” often hinges on the segment devoted to a hair and beauty transformation for the contestants, Ms. Skey said. On social networking sites like Facebook and MySpace, members’ intense self-focus and their attention to how they present themselves also affect 6- to 9-year-olds, even though technically, they aren’t allowed to set up profiles on the sites, she added. “We live in a culture of insta-celebrity,” Ms. Skey said. “Our little girls now grow up thinking they need to be ready for their close-up, lest the paparazzi arrive.”*

The tragic story of adolescent girls and young women estimating their own value by criteria of outer beauty and cultural expectation is bad enough — but now elementary-age girls are asked to join the party? This is sick.

Some observers relate this all to the “KGOY” trend — “Kids Getting Older Younger.” But in this case it is not just a matter of getting older faster, but of being tragically misled about the purpose of life and the truth of beauty.

Here is a cogent word of warning from author Rosalind Wiseman, as cited in the article:

*“Mothers and fathers do really crazy things with the best of intentions. I don’t care how it’s couched, if you’re permitting this with your daughter, you are hyper-sexualizing her. It’s one thing to have them play around with makeup at home within the bubble of the family. But once it shifts to another context, you are taking away the play and creating a consumer, and frankly, you run the risk of having one more person who feels she’s not good enough if she’s not buying the stuff.”*

This raises the issue of parental complicity in this pernicious cycle. Why would parents allow, much less encourage, the sexualization of their young daughters? True beauty is a matter of godly character, not of external appearance. We are setting these young girls up for disaster in more than one form.

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