

How Social Media Brings Bondage to Vanity

As a little girl, I loved the delight of a paper doll. I haven't seen them in the stores lately, so maybe only women of a certain age remember them. If you're my age, this may be a trip down memory lane, but if you're a younger chickadee, here's how they worked. The whole set came in a book with the doll printed on cardstock along with pages of stylish paper fashions for her to wear. I'd flip through the pages delighting in each colorful outfit, and then I'd break out my scissors. Sticking my tongue out one side of my mouth and squinting with my eyes just so, I'd guide my scissors down the dotted line with all the precision my tiny hands could muster. Soon a doll with her thin pile of wardrobe and accessories would accumulate. One by one, I'd try little Polly Paper Doll's outfits on her, folding the tabs neatly around her edges to hold her dresses, PJs and play clothes snugly in place.

Paper dolls were fun. For a little while. However, the problem with them was twofold. They were two-dimensional, and they were fragile. It only took a few minutes of play before my frustrations would start. Because she was flat, I couldn't hold her in my arms without her slipping out, and I couldn't stand her up without her falling down. She didn't have the substance to stand up to real-life activities like my cuddly baby dolls. After just a few rounds of playing dress-up and tea party, my dolly's paper tabs would rip off from the constant folding, and her now-worn body would begin to flop. Paper dolls are literally only the image of a real doll, and that was the root of the problem.

Our culture is obsessed with image. Hollywood, television, and every marketing ploy parades airbrushed images of the ideal life in front of us in a 24/7 news cycle. Social networking

has amped up the image-making factory to a new high gear. Suddenly, we're able to present a self-shaped version of ourselves to whomever is watching. We take 15 selfies and pick the best one to post, deleting all the ones that show our double chin. We can brag about a trip to a beautiful location without disclosing the amount of debt we accrued to get us there. We post accomplishments without telling of all the failures along the way. Here's the truth. I'm not proud of it, but I chose those examples because I've done every single one. I'm pretty sure I'm not the only one.

Let's take a look at some statistics about Facebook as one example. In 2008, Facebook had a whopping 100 million users; by the end of 2014, it boasted an unimaginable 1.4 billion. The average Facebook user has about 130 friends who let us in on everything from what they had for breakfast to the photos of their cat's last nap. Please don't get me wrong. I have two Facebook accounts, and I love the connection social networking brings. (Important note: I'll like the pictures of your cat napping if you'll like the pictures of my wiener dog peeking out from under her blanket!) I'm not being critical, but here are some additional stats that sat me back in my chair. In a recent survey, 21 percent of users confessed they checked Facebook in the middle of the night, and 34 percent said it was the first thing they do in the morning.

Let's think about that. In the middle of the night, when our bodies naturally crave sleep, 1 out of 5 people feels compelled to check their friends' latest updates. Over 1 in 3 checks out the updates on their Facebook feed as soon as they wake up. Before they do anything else. Like brush their teeth. Or go potty. Now, let me tell you something. Because I'm a girl of a certain age with a certain amount of wear and tear on her bladder, I don't do anything before I go potty in the morning. However, you might catch me picking up my phone and checking my newsfeed just after that little emergency trip.

What is driving us to such obsessive behaviors? What do these

statistics tell us? Although the study doesn't give the cause, I believe it's an obsession with measuring ourselves against others, and I'm not exempt from the madness. Good Girls and Never Good Enough Girls alike fall into the trap of trying to shape how others see us. It makes me sad to reflect on how often I've lived a paper-doll life, trying to create an image of myself to impress others and gain acceptance rather than living the purest version of the woman God created me to be. I cringe over all the times I've scanned the room or studied social media trying to figure out how I can do it all better. It's a disastrous recipe for never feeling good enough and adopting a cookie-cutter mentality.

Snip by snip we perfectionists cut the outline of a cardboard image with a perma-smile and fragile paper coverings to fit the rage of the moment. But there's a deep flaw in that way of living. Genesis 1 reveals God's radically different plan for His children. "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the livestock, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth'" (Gen. 1:26). God crafted us to reflect His image, not to create our own.

One of the beauties of bearing the image of the One True God is our individuality. He lovingly creates each image bearer with her own diversity and uniqueness. He's not a cookie-cutter kind of God. He's the God who created over 17,000 colorful, fluttering species of butterflies when a utilitarian god would have created a single pollinator. If we'll bear God's image instead of trying to create our own, we can live in the abundance of the verse above. God uses His image in our lives to deliver a breathtaking variety of personalities, heart-nourishing love, satisfying work and rich provision.

Excerpt from Breaking Up With Perfect by Amy Carroll. Amy writes devotions for Proverbs 31 Ministries' Encouragement for

Today which are sent out daily to over 750,000 people worldwide. She is a contributing author for The Reason We Speak, the NIV Real-Life Devotional Bible for Women and Encouragement for Today. Amy also is the founder and director of Next Step Speaker Services, a coaching service for Christian speakers.