

Youth Culture Lesson
Finding Teachable Moments in Culture
From *YouthWorker Journal* and YouthWorker.com

Do You Think I'm Pretty?

Asking the Wrong Questions on YouTube

By Paul Asay

What Happened:

Am I pretty or ugly? It's one of the most common questions asked by tween and teen girls on YouTube. More than half a million pretty-or-ugly videos currently exist on the site, most posted by girls between the ages of 9 and 14.

Most of the videos feel very much the same. A girl speaks into a webcam, asking for feedback on how they look. "Am I attractive?" some ask. "People say I'm ugly," others admit. "Am I?" They ask viewers to post in the comments section. Be honest, they're asked, but not rude. "Even if you say I'm ugly, just be like, 'you're ugly,'" says one girl (as quoted by *The XX Factor* blog). "Don't be like, 'EW UGLY' or something like that."

Why do girls post these sorts of videos? There might be lots of reasons. Some girls *know* they're pretty—but it's always nice to hear someone else say so. Others really want to know. Maybe they feel as if they can get more honest feedback from total strangers than from family or friends or from what they see in the mirror. For some, it might be a form of self-punishment or hurt.

Some simply might be looking for attention. According to the *XX Factor*, one girl posted a video titled "Am I ugly pretty beautiful or NOTHING?" Sometimes teens and kids can *feel* as if they are nothing—unseen, unnoticed, unloved. *Any* attention, even negative attention, is better than nothing.

Regardless of the reason, these vids can tap into some of the cruelest parts of the Internet. When you ask a troll if you're ugly, a troll almost always says yes (whether it's true or not) and in the rudest possible terms, or it might draw some *really* unwanted attention from bullies, creeps, pedophiles and who knows who else.

However, even if a pretty-or-ugly post doesn't bring out the worst on the Internet, the damage still can be harsh. Kids and teens who post such videos are often at an age when someone's opinion—anyone's opinion—matters a lot. Adolescents are looking for validation. They're filled with anxiety. One harsh comment can hurt a lot and for a long, long time.

Talk About It:

Do you think you're attractive? Ugly? Does it depend on the day, your mood or who you're with? Have you ever asked anyone—online or elsewhere—whether you're pretty or ugly? Who do you ask? Who do you trust?

Most of us care what people think of us—even if they’re total strangers. We want other people to think we’re pretty, smart or funny. Why is it important to us? Have you ever found yourself trying to impress someone you might never see again?

Do you think it’s good to pay attention to what other people think? Is there someone whose opinion really matters to you? Who is that person? Why do you trust that person?

What’s the nicest compliment someone’s ever given you? What’s the harshest thing someone’s said to you? What lasts longer: the good feeling you get with a compliment or the hurt you feel when someone slams you?

What the Bible Says:

Are we pretty or ugly? When we read the Bible, we see a very clear answer: You are beautiful. You are God’s creation and one of the Lord’s greatest treasures. God sees underneath the hair, makeup and clothes to the outstanding person underneath. In the end, no one else’s opinion matters.

“For You created my inmost being; You knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Your works are wonderful, I know that full well” (Ps. 139:13-14).

“But the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart’” (1 Sam. 16:7).

“Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold, jewelry or fine clothes. Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight” (1 Pet. 3:3-4).

Paul Asay has covered religion for *The Washington Post*, *Christianity Today*, Beliefnet.com, and *The (Colorado Springs) Gazette*. He writes about culture for *Plugged In* and wrote the Batman book, *God on the Streets of Gotham* (Tyndale). He lives in Colorado Springs with wife Wendy and his two children. Follow him on Twitter at @AsayPaul.