

# Brashich urges girls to root for real beauty

A few facts to mull over your morning java. According to a 2004 report commissioned by Dove, only two percent of women consider themselves beautiful, almost three-quarters think they're average-looking, and almost half think they weigh too much. More than 8,000 young women auditioned for the second season of *America's Next Top Model*.

Most 11- to 15-year-old girls are on a first-name basis with Britney, Paris, and Tara, but ask them to name a renowned female physicist? Correcting the balance is only one aim in New York author, now Vancouver resident, Audrey Brashich's *All Made Up* (Walker & Company, \$21.95). Its subtitle is *A Girl's Guide to Seeing Through Celebrity Hype and Celebrating Real Beauty*, and, balanced, honest, and lucid, the book does exactly that. This isn't a shrill anti-eye-shadow rant. "One of the key messages is that I'm not against images of beauty," Brashich says in an interview in a Kits coffee shop. "My desire is to show girls that the spotlight is too narrow. To get them asking who has been left out." And to wonder why Britney, Paris, and Tara are often celebrated just "for being thin and pretty".

This isn't sour grapes from a woman who doesn't conform physically to current beauty standards. Brashich is 35, blond, slim, and tall. So? More importantly, she gets her message across with conviction and quiet competence. She also speaks from experience. In 10th grade, Brashich was chosen to model for *Seventeen* magazine. "But a few snapshots

in a magazine wasn't nearly as important as being one of the first girls elected to my high school's student government in its almost 300-year-old history," she writes. "But that honour didn't make me more desirable or cool. And it made me wonder why." Imbalance between male perceptions of girls who were gorgeous and girls who were bright and the realization of the work it took to maintain "the look" also got Fulbright Scholar Brashich thinking. The "click" moment came when, as an editor at teen-aimed *YM* magazine, she read thousands of readers' letters and realized that whatever their socioeconomic status, they shared the belief that physical perfection equalled success.

What prompted her to start talking about the misconception was discovering that she was not alone in having "been influenced by all the hype about models, stars, 'It' girls, and celebrities", she writes. And as she says in her book: it is hype, plus smoke and mirrors: computer technology routinely erases blemishes, enhances cleavage, and slims thighs, and "buying the look" means a \$600 haircut from Nicole Kidman's stylist or \$400,000 for a Demi Moore total-body make-over. "The girls have one foot in each camp," she says. Although they want to look beautiful, "they're mad about how strict the standards are."

Brashich speaks often to school groups and at girl-power conferences, telling her audiences not to waste time worrying about weight and trends but to wonder what would happen



Audrey Brashich, author of *All Made Up: A Girl's Guide to Seeing Through Celebrity Hype and Celebrating Real Beauty*, blasts the notion that physical perfection equals success.

if that time was devoted to making the world better. What can they do? Start by speaking out. "I tell them that editors care about feedback [so] write to complain or praise. Have your own blog, create your own podcast." Often she gets them thinking by asking, "What jobs are most important on the planet?" Doctors, teachers—the answers are predictable. Then she questions: "What women do you see in the media?"

"The message they pick up at an early age is these women get the most money and publicity...looking this way is better. It pays to look this good. I can try to look like this and look at all the things I can get....Magazines encourage such scrutiny of celebrities, and it's hard not to turn that on ourselves." She encourages girls to fight back. "No matter what the limited media images suggest, there are lots of ways to be beautiful," she points out, advising readers to "refuse to obsess about your weight", "stop comparing", and "love your parts". Concluding each chapter, a "backtalk blog" raises questions ideal for on-line or in-class discussion. Even the

book's design is geared to the texting generation with bullet points, speech bubbles, and plenty of bold-faced subheads to keep their attention. She picked illustrator Shawn Banner, she says, because he could supply "something that had, for want of a better word, a chick-lit feel".

Her Web site ([www.audreybrashich.com/](http://www.audreybrashich.com/)) includes a lively blog on topics from teen pregnancy to *Harry Potter* author J.K. Rowling's dreams for her daughters. The news isn't all negative, says Brashich, citing Dove's Campaign for Real Beauty as a hopeful example of advertising that broadens the concept of beauty. (Dove's site, at [www.campaignforrealbeauty.com/](http://www.campaignforrealbeauty.com/), is well worth a look and includes the report mentioned earlier.)

"I hope girls will see it [her book] and be interested in it," she says. "It's not condemning everything that they like...I definitely hope parents will pick it up. If I can be a voice..."

It's probably idealistic to hope that high schools will include it in the curriculum, but if I had a daughter/sister/friend in that age group, I'd have a copy in her hands in a heartbeat. ♦

## CHIC OF THE WEEK > BY ANGELA MURRILLS

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