

IN MY OPINIONFeb 5 2004 **Caroline Porter****"Extreme Makeover" doesn't fix personalities**

You'd think that reality itself would be enough for most people, but apparently not, as evidenced by the popularity of the awful "reality" shows on television. I really can't watch people eat big bugs or bury their bodies in snakes. I squirm watching attractive men and women toy around with each other's emotions on the "bachelor and bachelorette" shows. The absolute worst of human nature is displayed on the Jerry Springer, Rikki Lake, Maury Povich and other talk shows. These people are making complete fools of themselves and think it's cute.

Of course, it's my choice whether or not to watch. Some days I'm just not in the mood to be a spectator at a gall bladder operation or see animals tear each other apart. Emergency rooms are always a nightmare, so why would we want to spend our free time watching programs about horrible medical crises? CSI (Crime Scene Investigation) is getting so graphic that the mystery of solving the case is secondary to the urge to throw up.

But the program "Extreme Makeover" disturbs me for a number of reasons. When I told our editor what I was going to write about — he asked, "Do you have any 'before' and 'after' pictures?" Very funny. The participants on the show, two each week, leave their families for months to have a complete makeover. Plastic surgeons rearrange their noses, faces, torsos and hips. No body part is spared, apparently. They all get new teeth and hairdos. The few times I have tuned in because I'm feeling ghoulish, I notice that every person looks like they have been given the same style and size of caps on their teeth. This means that some contestants are looking petty toothy. In fact, a few of them look like they are on the verge of whinnying.

They arrive home at a fancy location where all their family and friends have gathered. The poor souls who get the treatment usually look so different that if family and friends didn't expect them, they probably wouldn't be recognized. I've seen the startled looks on the faces of spouses as they gaze on the "new" person. It's creepy, really. But those I feel sorriest for are the children. Can you imagine having your mother go away for three or four months, which is a trauma anyway, to return in high heels and a low cut dress, in contrast to her usual sweats, with a different face, teeth, hair style and color? I think a child would find that frightening and unnerving.

And what kind of message does this give them? Plastic surgery is a blessing for someone who has physical deformity that deeply affects his life. But to be sculpted into a different person because we don't like the way we look is not an option we should be pushing. With the proper make-up and hairstyle, there are few women who would not be attractive. And men — well, they just have to keep their hair clean and styled and they can call it a day. Oh, yes, and a little deodorant wouldn't hurt.

The Parents Television Council (PTC) rates television shows and you can imagine they don't like much of what they see. "Extreme Makeover" gets is definitely a red alert and this is what they say.:

"The graphic depictions of surgery, occasional offensive language and nudity preclude us from recommending this series to any audience. In addition, the extreme measures people go to in order to change their natural appearance conveys a negative message to viewers regarding self-worth and self-esteem."

I am interested in future stories about the lives of these people. Changing one's looks will not solve most problems. They are within us and have to be dealt with. Stories are already filtering through about new problems at work for some of the women, because their peers are jealous and resentful. I wonder how their marriages are surviving. The reality is that most of us are not gorgeous creatures and depend on our personalities and intelligence to get along in this world.

The only procedure I've allowed myself to think about is tucking away some of my eyelids. The problem is that 67-year-old women are not supposed to look wide-eyed and surprised. We've just lived too long. And I would be afraid I might be featured on another charming reality show, "Plastic surgery gone wrong."

.....

On a totally unrelated matter, have you noticed that President Bush never talks while Dick Cheney is drinking water? Thanks to Fred Kuster for this gem.

Caroline Porter is a freelance writer from Galesburg who can be reached at cporter@galesburg.net. Other columns are online at www.thezephyr.com.