

Eight Cows

..... source unknown (adapted and modified by Amy Fox)

In most traditional African cultures, the standard price or dowry for a bride was two healthy, well-fed cows. Not many men could afford two cows, so it was an honor to be able to do so.

Many years ago, in a small African village, lived a plain woman– in fact, she was described by the villagers as "ugly". Despite being the oldest, her three beautiful younger sisters had been married off with their bride prices paid in full. Her parents began to worry that their oldest daughter would never get married.

In desperation, her parents announced that they would pay up to four cows to any man who would take their plain daughter as a bride.

The story of the ugly-woman traveled from village to village; her already damaged self-esteem disappeared completely and so did her self-confidence. She gave up hope of ever having a family of her own and resigned herself to die an old maid in her parent's tent.

Until one day when a stranger appeared at the door, offering to pay eight cows for his daughter. This strange arrangement became the talk of the village and everyone wondered who would pay eight cows for such an ugly woman. The next day, the marriage was performed and the ugly woman left as a bride.

The story of the eight cows became something of a legend and many years later, the local wise man of this village from which the woman was from, went to visit the married couple.

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When the wise man knocked on the door a beautiful woman answered. He inquired whether this was the home of the man who had paid a bride price of eight cows. The woman replied yes. He then asked to speak with the husband.

When the husband entered the room , the wise man asked "For the record, please tell me why you paid eight cows?"

The husband then asked, "Did not see my wife? Did she not answer the door? Do you not think she is worth even ten cows?"

The wise man was confused: "I am not questioning why you would pay ten cows for a beautiful woman. I have traveled this distance to understand why you paid eight cows for an ugly woman."

The husband was silent for a while, and then called for his wife. He said, "This is my only wife. She is the one I paid eight cows for and would gladly pay eight more."

The wise man exclaimed "They said she was ugly!!"

"She was never ugly," the husband replied. "Before we got married, she was simply a reflection of what she was told. They said she was ugly, they treated her as if she was ugly, and she behaved in response.

But eight cows told her a different story. Eight cows made a huge difference in how she thought about herself and how she carried herself. In all our land, no other woman ever had eight cows paid for her. My wife knew that I didn't think she was ugly, and you are a witness. She is not ugly! I am glad I could see beneath the surface, for look at what treasure I have".

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS & PROMPTS

OPENING CLASS

According to the American Psychological Association, self-worth is "an individual's evaluation of himself or herself as a valuable, capable human being deserving of respect and consideration."

Self-worth is an internal measure and it isn't tied to productivity, test scores or anything external.

But how often do we allow others or our circumstances to dictate our worth?

What if for this hour, you took your power back?
What if you allowed yourself to step into the truth of who you really are?

DURING CLASS

After Telling the Story

The desire to know that we are okay shows up in every area of life where uncertainty lurks. The delivery room. The boardroom. The bedroom. The classroom. When we are scared, unsettled and confused, we either look inside ourselves for the answer, or we look outside ourselves to the perceived authority, to the opinions of others.

The reality is, you are enough as you are in this moment. You have everything you need.

CLOSING CLASS

You are enough.

You have enough.

And you are exactly where you are meant to be.

EXTRAS

Author of the popular HBR article [How to Stop Worrying About What Other People Think Of You](#), high-performance psychologist Michael Gervais argues that our fear of other people's opinions – what he calls FOPO – may be the single greatest restrictor of human potential. In his new book, [The First Rule of Mastery](#) (Harvard Business Review Press), Gervais, who works with world-renowned athletes, artists, and musicians, as well as Fortune 100 leaders and teams, shares the mental skills and practices we need to overcome FOPO. This excerpt, which is lightly edited, explores our tendency to outsource our self worth – or look to others for external validation.