

The Importance of Seeing Beauty and Order

Doris Bergen*

Retired, Disting. Professor of Educational Psychology, USA

***Corresponding Author:** Doris Bergen, Retired, Disting. Professor of Educational Psychology, USA .

Received: February 17, 2021

Published: March 06, 2021

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When we moved to our new, smaller house last year, I bought a new bedspread for our master bedroom and it presently graces our bed in this house. We had only been in our new house a few months, however, before the coronavirus pandemic began and so we have spent many months primarily at home, with only a few vital trips to grocery and doctor since then. Of course, we have had no visitors and thus there has been no one other than my husband and myself to observe this lovely bedspread.

As the days wore on and the months became almost a year, my housekeeping skills have dwindled and I find it hard to care if the dining room table is dusty or the kitchen floor has crumbs. However, I am always careful to make our bed and I finish the task each morning by putting this bedspread on our bed. Why is this so important to me? What does it matter whether there is a bedspread on the bed? Who is going to see it and admire it? I have recently begun to think about this question and to ask myself about "the importance of seeing beauty and order".

I know that when one is at home alone or with a long time companion who is casual about how the house looks it would be easy just to leave the bedclothes pulled up and ready for a jump back in the next night. Why would anyone want to "make" the bed, and especially why would anyone want to cover the bed with a bedspread that has as its main purpose assuring that the bedroom looks more attractive. I began to wonder why it has been important for me to see this one aspect of order and beauty in my house every day.

Perhaps it is because I grew up at a time when, for many women, their major achievement was in making a beautiful and comfort-

able home environment for other family members. My own mother was very sharp and competent and she had been employed as a bookkeeper before marriage. However, women at that time were expected after marriage to focus their skill and energy on the role of "housewife," and thus, almost all her achievements were limited to the home. This focus on housekeeping as a way for women to demonstrate skill was "just the way things were" at that time, however and I did not ever hear her complain. Our family home was always a place where one could see beauty and order.

Times began to change as I grew up and because my family supported my more ambitious educational and professional goals, I was able to focus my achievements more broadly during my life. However, the messages about women's goal of excellence in raising a family and caring for a household were still messages I heard. In contrast to my mother's focus, therefore, I have had a bifurcated focus, which included showing competence (or preferably excellence) in both the traditional and nontraditional roles.

Although I am now retired, during this pandemic I have continued to achieve in my professional life. I have published two books, mentored a few graduate students, and planned online research presentations. My role as homemaker has suffered, however, and I have had less incentive to clean and polish everything in my home. However, the daily task of making the bed has continued to be very important to me! Even as I lift, spread, pat, and arrange the bedspread I am thinking, "Why am I still doing this every day?" But then, I answer, "Because it demonstrates that in this present disordered world, it is important still to see order and beauty in some part of my private environment." My hope is that all of us keep our

determination to do the seemingly unnecessary work of continuing to see order and beauty in our own presently reduced small world so that we will be ready to put our larger topsy-turvy world back in order as soon as possible!!

What are you doing to keep your private world looking ordered so that you will be ready to create and see beauty in the larger world during the coming years!

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