
The undeniable importance of denial.

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Oscar Wilde once said: “Illusion is the first of all pleasures”. Now it’s not that I want to bump chests with the larger-than-life Mr. Wilde, but I think he got it wrong on this one. Denial is the first of all pleasures. And having just turned 36 (ok, ok, damnit: 37), I know a thing or two about the pleasures, and necessities, of denial.

Let me give an example of unequivocal denial that all those over thirty will relate to. (Those under thirty can skip this paragraph; you won’t know what I’m talking about – yet. If you keep reading, don’t smirk, your time will come.). Those over thirty will know the guilty pleasure of bumping into an old high-school friend you haven’t seen since platform shoes were in fashion (the first time round), and with a pang of glee noticing the first fanning wrinkles around their eyes, the extra few good-living kilos that pad out their face a little too ruddily. And while your eyes stealthily scan their face the way a thousand-watt searchlight scans a midnight sea for survivors, you quietly think to yourself: “Boy, I’m glad I didn’t age the way they did. At least I still look pretty much the way I did at 25”.

Now that, ladies and gentlemen, is denial in its purest form.

But not all forms of denial are born equal, and not all afford us the same measure of pleasure.

First there’s pragmatic, necessary denial. The accountant of denials, this depend-

able, rational denial protects us against the harsh, inescapable realities of life: the cruel ending of love, sky-high taxes and inescapably sagging breasts.

The second kind of denial is impractical, non-essential denial. Don’t get me wrong: it is not because this denial is non-essential that it is less valuable. Au contraire: non-essential denial can be very essential indeed. This irrepressible dancing harlot of denials, non-essential denial is every girl’s best friend.

“It’s the kind of denial that keeps our hips slim and our husbands from growing beer bellies”

It’s the kind of denial that assures us our jeans don’t fit any tighter than they did last month, that we just left them in the dryer too long. It’s the kind of denial that convinces us to break the cardinal fashion rule “no miniskirts after 30” because well... it is Rock Werchter and we do don’t look a day over 28. It’s the kind of denial that whispers soothingly that just one more cookie won’t make the difference, or with

a reassuring shoulder pat reminds us that a glass of red wine a day is good for the heart. It’s the kind of denial that cheers us on to climb a bar counter at 2am to do the Two-Tequila Boogie with a boy barely out of college, knowing we have an 8am meeting the next day.

It’s also the kind of denial that keeps our best friends looking as youthful to us at 36 as they did at 22; the denial that keeps our hips slim and our husbands from growing beer bellies. It’s the kind of denial that keeps our parents from becoming senior citizens and the one that keeps us crooning “Like A Virgin” in the presence of our preteen son. But most importantly it’s the kind of denial that gives us the courage to backpack across India at forty, climb Mount Kilimanjaro at fifty or sell the house to motor along Route 66 in an open-top Alfa Romeo Spider at sixty-five.

This denial is the racy red lingerie, the little black whip and the fluffy pink handcuffs in our underwear drawer of life. It’s the denial that allows us to dream crazy dreams and take courageous decisions, regardless of the realities of our age or circumstances.

It is this priceless kind of denial that keeps us kicking up our skirts to dance on the bar counter of life – at 36, 56, and yes, also at 76.

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