



WHO DO YOU SEE WHEN YOU LOOK IN THE MIRROR?

By Yvonne Thomas, Ph.D.

Some people call Los Angeles the city of “beautiful people.” Granted, L.A. does have its share of good-looking individuals, some being native Angelenos and some coming from other points of origin. Indeed, many attractive people keep flocking to Los Angeles to break into acting, music, and/or modeling. However, things are NOT always as they seem – or look. Just as there are misperceptions that “it never rains in California” and that “nobody walks in L.A.,” likewise not all people are “beautiful” in California and look like a celebrity or a “Baywatch” lifeguard. Even the stars typically are primped, lit, and air brushed and don’t even look like THEIR real selves. Still, this is a tough place for people to call home especially if they already have some insecurities and dissatisfaction with how they look.

Many people suffer from what I generally call “body-image issues” (which can also include one’s facial features). Body-image issues refer to a person not being able to currently accept one or more aspects of how he or she looks. Frequently at the heart of why people are so negative about how they look is that they still carry around a mental picture of themselves from their youth and/or teenage years. It’s amazing how unshakable and SEEMINGLY PERMANENT the image of how one looked as a kid or teenager remains in the head of that person, in spite of changes – even vast ones – in one’s appearance in later years. Whether one’s nose has been reduced or breasts have been enlarged, or one’s glasses have been replaced with contact lenses, or one’s acne has been replaced by much clearer skin, or one has lost weight (if overweight before) or gained weight (if underweight previously), or now has straight (and white) teeth, often that person will still see oneself as the “fat kid,” or the “nerd,” or the “ugly,” teased, excluded, and/or unpopular child.

Often, in conjunction with this negative, indelible image that a person carries around of oneself, there is also often a hostile, angry reaction TOWARDS OTHERS currently in one’s life whom might be flattering towards or complimentary of the person. Frequently, a person who was ignored or ostracized for his or her looks is unwilling to accept much positive feedback graciously now because one remembers all too well the lack of support and acceptance offered when he or she was less attractive (by society’s and media’s standards).

The damage from holding onto an outdated, inaccurate self-image can be varied and extensive. One may be very self-conscious in general due to feeling judged and/or ignored and may feel uncomfortable “in one’s own skin.” As previously noted, one may also not warm to any of the positive attention, and may feel condemning of the positive person, wondering if he/she would have been so complimentary and even AWARE of him or her if he or she looked now as he or she did when younger. It may be difficult to TRUST people, to develop and deepen one’s relationships, and to feel one is liked/loved for reasons other than that he or she is more physically appealing now.

Tips for having a more ACCURATE self-image include trying to pinpoint at what age roughly you are stuck at seeing yourself, and then trying to recall memories of how you and others treated you then. Next, SLOWLY feel the emotions connected to these memories. The reason to do these steps is to unblock the upsetting thoughts and feelings you ORIGINALLY experienced in reaction to certain situations. Thus, one can work through these unresolved thoughts and feelings, which can then free up a person to see oneself in a more realistic, accurate light. Then, one can have more confidence, self-esteem, and comfortability in his or her own skin – and learn to let in the good support and acceptance of other people. If one is still unable to correct one’s body- image, working with a Psychologist who specializes in this area can be invaluable.

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