

## Do You See Insecurity Or Confidence Looking Into The Mirror?

by Mary Jo Rapini

I have a friend who constantly looks at herself in any and all mirrors. She is not conceited or even what I would call vain. In fact, this friend is one of my most beautiful friends but she doesn't see that in the mirror. She complains constantly of growing older, getting more saggy skin, and how she would like to have a surgeon give her a body lift and face lift. One day when she was looking at her reflection as we sat down to lunch I hinted that maybe she should quit her

obsession with looking at mirrors. I suggested it may be the mirror that was the real culprit to her lack of confidence with her looks. She turned to me with her eyes wide as she took that in. She had never thought about this concept. Apparently she looked to the mirror as a constant valuator of all she detested about her looks. She turned to the mirror to make sure nothing had gotten worse than the last time she checked.



My friend regards “looks” like many women I know. Women know too much about the influence of their looks. We know from numerous studies that beauty determines much of our life. We understand that attractive children are more popular with classmates and teachers than unattractive children. We understand that in a court of law the more attractive you are the less guilty you may be found. In all areas of life the more attractive the person the more that same person is thought of as good, intelligent, and popular. We become obsessed with how we look. Women are also much more critical about who is and who is not attractive.

Men are much healthier than women in the assessment of their own attractiveness. Men look in a mirror and judge themselves as better looking than they actually are. Women look in the mirror and see the Ugly Step Mother. In fact, women who look in the mirror excessively are most likely not looking for vanity reasons, but due to insecurity. Where is this coming from, or why is it getting worse? We look to the media to project our blame. The media is no doubt part of the problem. They show thin women who are made up or digitally altered to look so beautiful that we can never match it in real life. Our standards of beauty have become narrower and much less flexible. Whenever you lose the flexibility in what is beautiful, and who is beautiful you create an image that everyone must try to fit into. Pictures of what is accepted as beautiful are on billboards, TV, Internet, and magazines. We see them so much we begin to

think of these images as the norm. We, along with our families and friends, don't fit these images so we judge them and ourselves as inferior. We also become susceptible to what the ads are promoting, or commercials are saying in regards to how we can become beautiful. Weight loss ads, skin care commercials, and surgical enhancements are all part of this. The more critical we become regarding our looks the more vulnerable we become to these ads.

In a recent survey, 80% of women who were asked to rate themselves in a mirror did not like what they saw. That is a sobering 8 out of 10 women. Lesbian women and African American women were less harsh with their judgment. These two groups had a more flexible image of what determines beauty. The white Caucasian women were the most inflexible with their judgment. More than any other group, they seemed to have a definite concept of beauty and most of them could not measure up. Their main criticism was aimed at their bodies, especially their stomachs, hips, and thighs. Does this mean we are doomed to continue this cycle to our daughters for generations to come? If not, what can we do today to stop the body hate for the next generation?

- Try to limit looking in the mirror to once or twice a day.
- Watch your "self talk." What you say to yourself becomes who you are, and what you say to yourself is what your children hear and will later say to themselves.
- When you see a reflection of yourself, rather than judge it harshly, remind yourself that you actually look better than what you are thinking (I am borrowing from the men here).
- Stop all weight loss diets and adopt a lifestyle that involves movement every day.
- Focus on your relationships rather than your looks.
- Getting a massage or pampering your body is a way to nurture it and does much more than an expensive face cream ever will.
- To secure a relationship with your partner, put your focus on enjoying each other with intimacy and sex more than trying to look better (when you are connected with intimacy and sex, how you look becomes less important).
- Stay away from magazines or websites that promote an inflexible standard of beauty.
- Stay away from friends that focus on their outer beauty rather than what they can do to benefit other's lives.

- Be honest with your partner if their behavior or words make you feel judged or unattractive. Most likely, they were insensitive to what they said and how it may have affected you. Aging is difficult for everyone to some extent. Aging is especially difficult for women who have focused most of their attention on their looks rather than their interests. Begin today finding new interests, and ways you can give back and make someone else's life better. The best cure for insecurity with one's looks is having confidence that what you do is valued and needed by others. You don't have to be "HOT" or "ATTRACTIVE" to be a beautiful person.



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Mary Jo maintains a private practice and is the Intimacy/Sex Psychotherapist for the Methodist Hospital Pelvic Restorative Center and The Methodist Hospital Weight Management Center. Additionally, she is a renowned lecturer, author and television personality.

Currently you can find Mary Jo on the TLC series Big Medicine, and Wednesday Mornings from 9 to 10am on Fox Houston's Morning News. She contributes on-air for CNN's Prime News, CBS up to the Minute, Fox National Morning News, Montel and various Houston television and radio programs. Mary Jo is also featured in a Discovery Channel show about Near Death Experiences (first air date Jan. 4, 2010).

Mary Jo is a contributing expert for Cosmopolitan Magazine, Women's Health, First, The New York Daily News, Seventeen Magazine, Redbook and Self Magazine's "Love and Relationship" section. Additionally she is a "City Bright" blogger for the Houston Chronicle, and is a contributing columnist for HealthNewsDigest.com and Houston Family Magazine.

Mary Jo is a popular key-note speaker across the nation. Her dynamic style is particularly engaging for those dealing with intimacy issues and relationship challenges, or those simply hanging on to unasked questions about sex in relationships. She also excels at speaking to groups of young girls dealing with body image issues and delivers a message that is geared to helping girls become strong women.

Rapini is the author of two books: Is God Pink? Dying to Heal and co-author of Start Talking: A Girl's Guide for You and Your Mom about Health, Sex or Whatever.

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