

Mirror Mirror: Healing Body Issues from the Inside Out

By: Dori L. Gatter, Psy.D., LPC

An astounding 80% of women in the US have Body Image Issues. These issues range from stress around getting dressed in the morning to severe medical disorders. Our nation's most popular Doll, *Barbie*, has unobtainable and unhealthy body proportions; if she were alive her waist would be smaller than patient's with anorexia nervosa. Research has shown that very young girls age 5-7 who have been exposed to *Barbie* have lower body esteem and want a thinner body than they have. (Dittmer, Halliwell, Ive, 2006) More than half of the girls 18-25 would rather be hit by a truck than be overweight. (Courtney Martin, 2007)

These statistics are staggering.

Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD) affects a high percentage of women. I believe that most of us fall somewhere on the continuum. BDD is characterized by excessive preoccupation with imagined defects in physical appearance, which is a form of self-hate and non-acceptance. Often times the root may not have anything to do with physical appearance. When digging into the root cause we find there is a non-acceptance of the whole person from the inside out. The primary message BDD sufferers carry is "I'm not good enough, I'm unlovable". This plays out through the reflection in the mirror in that no matter what the person does with his/her appearance the core issue doesn't shift and relief cannot be found. Sufferers also walk through life believing that others are judging and criticizing them, which can create other issues such as anxiety. The anxiety can show up more when in public and social settings. People with BDD most commonly try to find relief by spending excessive time and money buying make-up to cover imagined flaws, buying high end clothing and accessories to make up for feelings of inadequacy, plastic surgery to actually permanently change areas of the body they believe are disproportionate or ugly, excessive dieting and a preoccupation with food.

Our fashion role models have become the actors and models that walk the red carpet and grace magazine covers. Despite their age most appear to look in their twenties due to camera tricks, lighting, makeup and altered clothing. This is an unrealistic goal as it is nothing more than an illusion. We've been programmed to believe that we need to compete with the younger generation. With that being the goal, our sense of personal style gets lost. If you are not dressing for your body type, the clothes you are wearing can cause the illusion of body shape distortion, further adding to the stress regarding body image.

How do you know if you are someone who suffers from some form of BDD? Again, I believe we all fall somewhere on the continuum. Do you compare yourself to others? The moment you are in the energy of comparing, whether you feel you fall short or feel better than, you are in the issue.

These issues need to be worked on from two directions. As a Psychotherapist I work to identify and clear the negative beliefs and messages related to one's body image and self worth. By taking a detailed history of the person and identifying where these negative messages originated, and the experiences that negatively impacted us, we become conscious and aware of how we've been living in reaction to these experiences. This is a huge step in the healing process and creates change.

As an Image Consultant I help people identify their style and create a look that is up to date and comfortable for them. Most women over 40 tend to get lost between dressing too young or too old. Many women cannot find the appropriate combination of a sophisticated/sexy/stylish look. I offer many services and work with the client by creating a relationship that's built on a safe and holding environment without judgment and criticism. I may begin by scanning your closet, which holds clues to your inner self, all your selves. Who you are now, who you were and who you dream of being. By shedding and getting current you are poised to change your whole life. We may actually go shopping. I also give assessments and direction on hair, make-up, skin care, physical fitness, alternative health and wellness and much more. Most of us don't make the necessary changes due to fear, but often times it is a lack of knowledge about what is available. The most important aspect of working to create a new or updated image is to incorporate a "mirror" to work with. A mirror is someone who supports and accepts you for who you are and can gently and lovingly guide you beyond your comfort zone.

Working as an Image Consultant and Therapist, I find that the issues women are struggling with tend to come to the surface as we work on updating their outer appearance. This two-pronged approach can be very effective in healing the issues related to BDD. The benefits in healing these issues leads us to higher self-esteem and more satisfying lives which includes a feeling of freedom and the ability to enjoy a more sexy, sophisticated, and unique style!

Quick Tips you can try now:

- When looking in the mirror, focus on what you like and emphasize it. The new accessory to flatter you face this spring are lightweight scarves! Buy them in different colors and patterns and turn boring outfits into new vibrant outfits!
- Speak with your hairstylist about hairstyles and colors that enhance your best features and skin color. Deep condition your hair weekly and get a Gloss Treatment. After 40 our hair loses it's luster and we can look older!
- Organize! Remove outdated clothing and extra hangers from your closet and get a shoe rack. You can't accurately assess what you need until you can easily see everything you have!
- When you see someone whose look you love, ask them where they shop or get their hair styled!
- Work with an Image Consultant to help you find your style!

****If you are suffering from issues related to BDD please seek a professional for help and support.***