

# Psychology



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Psychology In an article by Carlin Flora, the psychology behind the pursuit of absolute beauty is discussed. She indicates that people widely accept the idea that those who are considered physically attractive receive preferential treatment in every social situation whether they are at the mall or at work. However, while those that are jealous of others perceived as beautiful decry the advantages received by them, Flora points out that they are hardly objective when it comes to judging their own appearance. When people look at others, they see a quickly assessed overall view. But when they look at themselves in the mirror, they see only the imperfections of which they are already well aware.

The good news is that if we can't depend on our own judgment and we're mistrustful of the reassurances of our friends, it has been established that people have the inherent capability to alter how others perceive the way they look simply in the way they present themselves. "When you're convinced you look good, others see you in a more favorable light" (Flora, 2006). People, mostly women, tend to feel more attractive around people who aren't as appealing as they are and less attractive around people they perceive as having more appealing features. These social comparisons occur constantly and automatically, not only when strangers are deliberately scrutinized. Psychologists refer to this phenomenon as the 'contrast effect.' According to Richard Robins, professor of psychology at the University of California, Davis, women universally use a scale for beauty that is unreasonable. For example, in a study, neither gender used people such as Einstein as a comparison when appraising their own intelligence, but women compare a biased view of their own beauty to that of super models. Another study showed how self-awareness of appearance affects cognitive actions.

When males and females were given a math test, both genders had similar results but when another test was given with the females dressed in swimsuits, they scored much lower than their male counterparts. When the men wore swimsuits, the difference was negligible.

I am not surprised to find that studies show women to be more obsessed with their outward appearance than men. Society has long established the idea that a woman's only value is reflected in the quality of the man she can attract. Since men tend to base their own preferences upon the outward appearance of women, it becomes necessary for women to be concerned with doing all she can to attract the best man available at the risk of incurring the wrath of all other women. Even after she has established her connection to the world through a marriage to an eligible man, she remains threatened as all too often men are seen to leave their older, more experienced wives for younger and firmer women. Since the ideals that men hold in their heads are the ideals that are presented in Hollywood, who else would women compare themselves to?

However, I also agree with Flora that the way we feel inside has a lot to do with the way we're perceived outside. When we feel confident and beautiful, we walk with a certain amount of confidence and we tend to smile a lot more. We're more open to conversations and we carry our heads high, meeting people's gaze and allowing them to see our faces. We're also quicker to pick up on the subtle flirting cues sent to us from the opposite sex, sure that our interpretation of the action is correct. When we feel unattractive, we tend to look down, hide in the corner and become a little less sociable. We're less confident in the way that we respond to others and that becomes translated to them as a sign of weakness, which is unattractive

in a highly competitive society. When members of the opposite sex begin flirting with us, we dismiss it as a trick of the light or a misunderstanding instead of what it was.

From these studies, I think it's obvious that if women want to appear more attractive to others, they must first reconsider the way in which they think about themselves. Rather than basing their assessment on the supermodels of the high fashion runway, they should look to the people around them for an idea of what the average woman really looks like. Rather than focusing on the small scar above their right eyebrow as an ugly reminder of that childhood case of chicken pox, they should stand away from the mirror and get a moving glimpse of how they might appear to others as they walk into a room. Instead of focusing on the small details that no one will see, women will then have a better chance to judge for themselves what others might think. This frees up a lot of anxiety regarding those five extra pounds around the waist that just won't go away and allows the woman to focus instead on the shining brilliance of her hair as it flows down her back or swoops over her forehead, the very things others are actually focusing on. This new way of looking at herself should provide her with a more positive view of the figure she's presenting, allowing her to feel beautiful inside more often, which will positively reinforce her belief that she is indeed a beautiful specimen of the human race.

#### References

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