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Lighten Up ~ Why Comparing Yourself To Others On Social Media Is Irrelevant and Unproductive

We all do it. Go on your Facebook or Instagram feed and you'll be hard pressed not to find selfies of people flexing at the gym or sunbathing in a bikini. Sprinkled in are ads for skin creams, weight management shakes, hair restoration, cosmetic procedures and butt lifting yoga pants. Thanks to smartphones and selfie culture we are all online being bombarded and obsessing over physical appearance, especially our own. We spoke to Dr. Sanam Hafeez a NYC based licensed clinical psychologist. She says it is time to lighten up. Below are some common obsessive thoughts and actions on physical appearance and what to do about them.

1. "It takes me an hour and 5 outfit changes before I can leave the house."

"When you find it difficult to commit to an outfit choice and rapidly change outfits only to look in the mirror thinking everything looks terrible, there is certainly heightened anxiety taking place," explains Dr. Hafeez. She adds, the problem isn't the clothes. The problem is self-perception and mindset. "The better you feel about yourself from the inside and the more positive things you have in your life to be appreciative of, the less time you will spend on clothing choices. You'll know exactly what you want to wear and you'll be more than satisfied with your choice," offers Hafeez.

The solution? She suggests training your mind to decide and stick to the style decision by setting an alarm for 5 minutes to brainstorm 2 options. Dr. Hafeez also encourages focusing on where you are going and the positive aspects of the anticipated experience to shift the mind off your physical appearance.

2. *“I can’t pass a reflective surface without checking myself in it.”*

If you’re checking yourself out thinking, you look fantastic and swiftly continue to walk on that’s normal, fine, and even healthy. However, if you are thinking, you need to lose weight, that you have a double chin, that you look old, that your hair is terrible, then you’re beating yourself up and are focused on unattainable perfection. “Our bodies will change and we will age. This is a fact of life. Exercising for as little as 20 minutes per day, eating healthily, walking, reading and meditation are all things that are beneficial to us. When we make how we feel top priority, we start to look good. We’re more radiant, smiling, and have higher, more positive energy,” explains Dr. Hafeez.

3. *“I never can leave the house without make-up.”*

This is a tough one and common for a lot of women. We all want that fresh faced, gorgeous without trying look. Very few women past puberty can achieve it. “There’s a difference between the level of self-consciousness between a woman who takes 10 minutes to put on some moisturizing foundation, mascara and lip gloss and someone who must spend an hour a full face of make-up perfectly applied,” says Dr. Hafeez.

Getting monthly facials and educating yourself on different make up formulations can help you cut down on the amount of make-up needed. This could shorten the time it takes getting glammed up!

4. *“I constantly compare myself to others on social media, in magazines, in public.”*

Dr. Kirk Brandow, founder and director of the Brandow Clinic for Cosmetic Surgery who has appeared on national programs such as Good Morning America and 20/20, commenting on physical appearance says comparison mindset is incredibly common. “Ten years ago people would come to me with pictures of celebrities, and now they’re showing me random people on their social media feeds. It is unreasonable to compare yourself to a celebrity as they have a team of trainers and stylists that help them achieve and maintain a certain desired look. Today people see their high school friend on social media with the perfect breasts and they want that same look. People are really comparing themselves to everyone now,” he candidly explains.

Dr. Hafeez advises taking breaks from social media and doing body strengthening and range of motion exercises that also weave in breathing and mindfulness such as yoga or tai chi. “When you are aware of your body’s strength and your general well-being, you’re not going to compare yourself to others”. When you’re too busy enjoying a happy, healthy, you won’t care about others’ posts; this is what we should all strive to do. Comparing ourselves to others is irrelevant and unproductive. You should strive to be your best beautiful self.

5. “I have a list of cosmetic procedures I want to do and am planning to do this year!”

This is when we must be mindful of body dysmorphia. When we have a distorted perception of our appearance it can lead to an addiction to cosmetic procedures. Dr. Brandow adds that it is very important for cosmetic surgeons to screen people to see if they have signs of body dysmorphia. “Ethically when someone comes in with a list of flaws they want to fix it is up to us professionals to advise them appropriately. When someone is addicted to surgeries and tries to “fix” the same body part repeatedly, that’s a red flag.

Dr. Sanam Hafeez suggests keeping an “appreciation journal” and write down 10 things you appreciate about yourself and your life. This will lessen harsh self-criticism and the need to measure up to any physical ideal.

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About the doctors:

***Dr. Sanam Hafeez PsyD** is a NYC based licensed clinical psychologist, teaching faculty member at the prestigious Columbia University Teacher’s College and the founder and Clinical Director of Comprehensive Consultation Psychological Services, P.C. a neuropsychological, developmental and educational center in Manhattan and Queens. Connect with her via twitter @comprehendMind or www.comprehendthemind.com*

***Dr. Kirk Brandow**, founder and director of Brandow Clinic for Cosmetic Surgery is a plastic surgeon with practices in the Philadelphia metro area. Named a “Top Doc” in Plastic Surgery by Philadelphia Magazine as well as nationally recognized for one of America’s “Best Plastic Surgeons” of this decade, Dr. Brandow is a trusted expert who has developed many innovative, minimally invasive procedures for the face, body and skin. He has been featured on local, national and international television programs including 20/20, CNN’s Headline News, Good Morning America. Connect with Dr. Brandow via www.brandowclinic.com*