

Self-Image What's Yours?

Self-image is that perspective that we have about ourselves. It's kind of like looking in some sort of mirror in order to determine what we look like. We stand in front of these mirrors and try to figure out who we are, what we are and what we're not. We tilt our heads and squint, trying to make out the reflection of our heads, our hearts or whatever's in there.

We are constantly coming back to these mirrors in order to figure out who we are and what's in there. Conflict brings us back. A relationship gone bad brings us back. A job loss, financial collapse, personal failures, the upheaval of mid-life crisis or some tragedy all bring us back. These kinds of things make us question ourselves so we're back in front of some foggy, squiggly mirror with squinted eyes trying to get our bearings again.

Distorted Mirrors

You've seen the mirrors that distort your image. Those can be the kind in the Fun House at the circus or antique mirrors aged and faded by time. The image isn't quite right. Sometimes it's close and other times its way off, but it's not accurate.

It seems that most of the time a poor self-image is the result of a distorted mirror. You see, we don't make our mirrors. Most often they're made for us. Key people in our lives make them. Mom's and Dad's and relatives and friends and teachers and pastors and bosses make them. These people all have a hand in building the mirrors that we peer into.

For some of us those mirrors are fairly accurate. We were fortunate enough to have some solid people around us who knew enough about who they were to help us build accurate mirrors. For others of us however, we came from difficult or dysfunctional situations where the mirrors got all messed up. We were told that we were worthless. Negative messages poured in almost relentlessly. We were labeled, categorized, put in some sort of personally diminishing box, cataloged and stamped as inadequate, stupid, a born loser, a mistake, a burden, an object, or any of a million other destructive identities.

Our mirrors were shaped to reflect these things back to us even if they weren't there. We gaze into these mirrors trying to see who we are. Reflected back to us are distorted images emblazoned on these mirrors that have nothing to do with who we really are. When we look in the mirror it sure looks like those things are there, but they're not. They're convincing alright, but they're not reality. Our self-image is whittled away and eventually destroyed if we're not able to understand that what I see is not what I am. Rather, it's what other people told me I am.

It's Their Reflection

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People in our lives build their reflections into our mirrors. It's called projection. Projection is where someone places their issues on us. It's a convenient way to avoid dealing with our issues by putting them on someone else. And so people project their issues or their deficiencies or their quirks into our mirrors. And when we look into those mirrors, those things distort our image.

We are not those things. They are simply a distortion of our true selves. Sadly, we tend to embrace them as being true about us and we incorporate them into our lives as if they are real. They're not.

Adjusting Our Mirrors

We need to adjust our mirrors, to clean them up. That can be done by identifying what people have put there and telling yourself that it's their image not yours. It's looking closely enough to ask "whose reflection am I really seeing here?" It's not about denying any of the bad stuff we see by attributing it to someone else. That kind of stuff's too easy to do. It's more about an honest assessment, teasing out fact from fiction and tale from truth. Who am I really? It's a great question and one worth figuring out. So . . . look in the mirror again, but look differently.