

## ***Coping with College Series***

### Mirror Talk

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"I'm fat." "I look terrible." "My body is disgusting." "No wonder no one wants to date me." Mirror talk. It's cruel, harmful, and extremely common. Very few people in our society - men or women - can look at themselves and like what they see.

Why? Why have we become so obsessed with how we look? Is it possible to change? Many factors contribute to how we feel about our bodies. The media -- magazines, television and movies -- have a big impact on how we think we're supposed to look. Family, friends, and significant others also affect how we feel about our bodies. We also compare ourselves to our friends and often feel worse when we hear the negative comments others make about their bodies. ("If she thinks she's fat, then what does she think I am?")

Why does it matter? First, a negative body image can dramatically lower your self-esteem. It makes people feel lousy about themselves, overlooking their positive qualities, and doubting their worth. Secondly, negative body image can greatly affect behaviors around food and exercise, resulting in unhealthy dieting, compulsive exercise, and for some, eating disorders.

There are ways to develop a more positive body image. Appreciate your body for all that it can do rather than emphasizing how it looks. See yourself as a whole person, rather than focusing on specific body parts that you dislike (that's the way the rest of the world sees you). Read fewer fashion magazines. Ask your friends not to talk about diets or critique their bodies when you're around. Respect other people regardless of their body size; then do the same for yourself.

Stop using your size and shape as a measure of your value. If you still find it hard to look in the mirror, use some of the resources on campus. Contact Student Counseling Services. Our counselors could help you become less critical of your body. Or attend one of the Body Acceptance Coalition programs during February. The **I am Beautiful** seminar on February 12, at 7 p.m. in Braden Auditorium might help you learn to celebrate the power of your own unique beauty and stop the critical mirror talk. Hope to see you there.