

6 Women do not look at themselves this way. If I had to express, in three words, what I believe most women think about their appearance, those words would be: “not good enough.” No matter how attractive a woman may appear to be to others, when she looks at herself in the mirror, she thinks: woof. She thinks that at any moment a municipal animal-control officer is going to throw a net over her and haul her off to the shelter.

7 Why do women have such low self-esteem? There are many complex psychological and societal reasons, by which I mean Barbie. Girls grow up playing with a doll proportioned such that, if it were a human, it would be seven feet tall and weigh eighty-one pounds, of which fifty-three pounds would be bosoms. This is a difficult appearance standard to live up to, especially when you contrast it with the standard set for little boys by their dolls . . . excuse me, by their action figures. Most of the action figures that my son played with when he was little were hideous-looking. For example, he was very fond of an action figure (part of the He-Man series) called “Buzz-Off,” who was part human, part flying insect. Buzz-Off was not a looker. But he was extremely self-confident. You could not imagine Buzz-Off saying to the other action figures: “Do you think these wings make my hips look big?”

8 But women grow up thinking they need to look like Barbie, which for most women is impossible, although there is a multibillion-dollar beauty industry devoted to convincing women that they must try. I once saw an *Oprah* show wherein supermodel Cindy Crawford dispensed makeup tips to the studio audience. Cindy had all these middle-aged women applying beauty products to their faces; she stressed how important it was to apply them in a certain way, using the tips of their fingers. All the women dutifully did this, even though it was obvious to any sane observer that, no matter how carefully they applied these products, they would never look remotely like Cindy Crawford, who is some kind of genetic mutation.

9 I’m not saying that men are superior. I’m just saying that you’re not going to get a group of middle-aged men to sit in a room and apply cosmetics to themselves under the instruction of Brad Pitt, in hopes of looking more like him. Men would realize that this task was pointless and demeaning.<sup>2</sup> They would find some way to bolster their self-esteem that did not require looking like Brad Pitt. They would say to Brad: “Oh YEAH? Well what do you know about LAWN CARE, pretty boy?”

10 Of course many women will argue that the reason they become obsessed with trying to look like Cindy Crawford is that men, being as shallow as a drop of spit, WANT women to look that way. To which I have two responses:

11 1. Hey, just because WE’RE idiots, that does not mean YOU have to be; and

12 2. Men don’t even notice 97 percent of the beauty efforts you make anyway. Take fingernails. The average woman spends 5,000 hours per year worrying about her fingernails; I have never once, in more than forty years of listening to men talk about women, heard a man say, “She has a nice set of fingernails!” Many men would not notice if a woman had upward of four hands.

**Pause** What two subjects does Barry contrast in paragraph 7?

**Pause** What is Barry’s main idea in paragraph 8?

2. **demeaning:** degrading, lowering one’s character