

# We run by the mirror

16 May 2019

*Reflections on the human condition*



*[Image: I. Gezalian - Unsplash]*

I was younger,

I often looked in mirrors

And grinned at myself.

I loved my body—

It was smooth and straight;

Ah, my spritely youth.

Oh—my skin was clear,

My legs were lean and lovely,

And my arms were thin.

Ah, I remember

How I loved the way I looked—

All was clean and sound.

Things were easier—

All was perfect and simple,

No worries in sight.

I didn't know loss,

My heart was never broken;

I drifted through life.

But time keeps moving,

And youth can't last forever—

That I have learned well.

I was beautiful.

I was strong and confident—

Lamenting looks lost.

Now I am older,

That I see in the mirror.

So, the years have passed.

I hate my body—

It is saggy and wrinkly,

And everything hurts.

My body's ugly—

Now I see bends and roughness;

I am decaying.

Thus, I run from it—

I leave that mirror behind.

I can't stand to look.

But I have seen much—

I have loved and I have lost

With smiles and tears.

Like a book's pages,

My wrinkles are important—

They tell my story.

Now, I see much more.

I see wisdom, joy, and strength.

I am resilient.

I am beautiful.

I am strong and confident.

Unearthing beauty.

What is it like to look in the mirror when you're young? Perhaps you look into your own critical eyes as you adjust your hair, turn to the side to judge your outfit, carefully examine your makeup. School is cutthroat, and you want to be looking your best. Perhaps you adjust your hair again and give yourself one last satisfied smile before grabbing your backpack and running out the door.

You were young then and growing older has yet to cross your mind. But soon the years pass, and your thought process changes. Suddenly, the mirror's reflective surface means seeing your wrinkles, stretches, tears. It means dissatisfaction. It means guilt.

Now, looking into your own eyes means facing the hard fact of your increasing age. Because you've watched your smooth skin shrivel up, and you remember the imminence of your own decay. You are disgusted with yourself, and you despise what you see reflected before you.

In fact, you find yourself becoming wary of that surface. You begin to take only the quickest of glances—or none at all if you can help it. You wish you could cover it up and run from it in the desperate hope of escaping your own desolate fate that you've crafted for yourself. You are ashamed of your own body. But why?

This kind of experience happens constantly, and it only increases with time. And yet, no one has stopped to wonder WHAT exactly is driving this cycle of dissatisfaction, and WHY do we continue to allow it to happen?

The answer, ladies and gentlemen, is AGEISM, or discrimination based upon one's age. It means an inferiority that comes with growing old, an implied weakness. And society only continues to strengthen this, with its

bombardment of products announcing “anti-aging” or “wrinkle-free” effects. Seeing this makes it clear: being old is ugly and shameful, and we must do everything we can to stop or delay the aging process.

But again, I ask you—why? When getting old is no more than a natural process that all of us go through, how could it represent something so distasteful to the masses? It’s not like it’s unique to a minority of people, or that it can be avoided. It’s just a part of the human experience.

The conclusion then becomes that old age is so terrible simply because it has become an *‘other’*, a way of being ostracized based on our own self-denial about its impending nature. Discriminating against the elderly only allows young people to disregard older age. Because they are not older — Yet!

But what they fail to recognize is that getting older only means you’ve been alive a long time. It means you are resilient, smart, wise, and strong. You’ve felt the greatest elation and the deepest sadness. You’ve been astonished, regretful, excited, ashamed, satisfied, sympathetic, contented. It means you’ve LIVED. And no one can take that away from you.

And that is why Gray Panthers, an organization based out of New York City and founded by the iconic Maggie Kuhn, serves to fight manifestations of ageism like these in all its forms. Whether it be marching on the street or speaking to world leaders, this group has continued to show its dedication to this pertinent issue. It seeks to show people in society just how important the aging process is, and to celebrate it rather than facing it with fear and rejection. Because, as the Gray Panthers understand, your wrinkles and bends are only a visual representation of just how strong you are. Your skin serves to show how much you’ve been through and just how many mountains you’ve traversed. Remember that.

So, smile at yourself in the mirror. Touch your wrinkles. Leave those “anti-aging” products on the shelves. Let your body speak and tell the incredible

story that can only be written with years of experience. Because, as Maggie Kuhn said, "The best age is the age you are."

*[Source: Brynn April, summer intern, Gray Panthers NYC]*