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FAMILY COUNSELING
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EGO SYNTONICITY

Ego is another word for how you see yourself. Syntonic means harmonious. Something that is ego syntonic is consistent with the way you see yourself. Dystonic means disharmonious. Something that is dystonic is inconsistent with the way you see yourself.

A few years ago, the winner of the Miss America contest told a reporter that she had matured late physically and had really never dated through out her high school years. Although she had begun to develop in her senior year, she was focused on graduation and didn't take time to respond to the enquiries of any interested boys. After she graduated she got a job. Her new employer sent a picture of her and filled out an application for her to be in a beauty pageant. She was accepted and won the pageant. The winner of that pageant went on to the next pageant and so on. Not too long after that she found herself being crowned Miss America. Having never been seen as particularly attractive in high school, this was a very ego dystonic experience for her. She reported that when someone commented on how attractive she was, she still had an impulse to turn and look behind her to see whom the person was talking about. Being sought out for her beauty was ego dystonic for her at the time of her crowning.

Even though an attribute may be positive, it still clashes with our self-image when others see us in a way that is at odds with the way we see ourselves. Ego dystonic experiences are usually rather uncomfortable. People who lose significant amounts of weight routinely report this. Even though the new attention may be positive and desirable, it can take time before the new attention stops being jarring. Thus, people in pursuit of desired changes must be prepared to deal with the stress of the discomfort of ego dystonicity. This can require consciously overruling our unconscious desire to avoid discomfort of any kind. Cutting out or drawing a picture of our new ego state and posting it on our bathroom mirror is one way to begin the transition process. Over time, the new changes become integrated into our new self-image and they become ego Syntonic.

Dr. Kate Brizendine, a noted change manager, says that in the cocoon, there is no caterpillar and no butterfly; there is only cosmic mush. This would be ego dystonic for the caterpillar. But the process is underway and the butterfly will emerge to fight its way out one wet wing at a time. By then it's new self will be ego syntonic.