



Can't accept a compliment? It takes real skill to master the art of receiving praise.

By Jenna McCarthy

no THANKS

The other day, I ran into an acquaintance I hadn't seen in nearly a year. She'd cut her hair, had on a great outfit and was positively radiant. I told her she looked wonderful.

Apparently, I was mistaken. You see, she had, in fact, gained 2 pounds in as many days, and the top she was wearing? Not only borrowed without permission from her roommate, but hadn't I seen the tear in the inside hem? (I had not.) As if that weren't enough to make me want to retract my kind comment, she confided that she hadn't shaved all week. At this point she actually presented a stubbly calf for my inspection, lest I at some later date accuse her of withholding evidence.

She was right. She was a mess.

She's also in good company. A staggering number of people — mostly women, I'm afraid — simply can't take a compliment. These gals don't just refuse flattery. (That would go something like, "Thanks just the same, but I'm not in the mood to feel good today.") They systematically negate positive attention by pointing out every flaw they possess, real or imagined.

Praise-haters will be happy to know this habit serves several purposes: It turns the attention away from your

accomplishments (who ever said you could take pride in those, anyway?). It lets all those evil sycophants out there know you're on to them (you *know* she's only sucking up to you because she wants to steal your boyfriend). And it proves beyond a doubt that you're humble and not the least bit pretentious (despite how fabulous and perfect you may appear to the rest of the world).

The thing is, when you refuse someone's praise, you are actually insulting them. When a friend compliments your shoes and you respond by insisting they're so hideous you can't believe you're wearing them in public, you're essentially saying your friend has lousy taste. Likewise, when you answer a customary compliment ("You look well") with a slew of evidence to the contrary, it leaves your benefactor feeling foolish and inept and wishing she'd said nothing at all.

Some women believe that compliments, much like tennis balls, must always be immediately returned. ("Great boots!" "Thanks! I love your skirt!") Did you ever notice men don't have any problem receiving unilateral praise? In fact, they demand it. A guy scores a basket from center court and he'll be bragging about it for weeks. "But did you see that shot?" he'll ask ad nauseam. (We saw already.) Tell him he looks great and he'll probably cock his

She'd cut her hair and had on a great outfit. I told her she looked wonderful. Apparently, I was mistaken.

head back, nod and simply say "thanks," spoken with absolute confidence and a knowing look that makes you feel like a genius for having noticed.

Therein lies the beauty of the compliment. At its finest, both the giver and the receiver walk away feeling better for the exchange. If you can't muster that single embarrassing syllable without feeling flustered, try this: The next time someone tells you that you look great, don't hem. Don't haw. Don't let the word "likewise" leave your lips. Instead smile sincerely and say, "That means a lot coming from you." It's the least — and best — you can do.

Jenna McCarthy is a Santa Barbara, Calif.-based free-lance writer.