Narcissus drowned

My wife says narcissism is a guy thing. I am tempted to ask if she has ever been formally introduced to her younger sister, but I wisely demur. Instead, I mention the comment that our teenage son recently made, pointing to a classmate: “Look, if you watch closely, you can actually see the universe revolve around her.” Still, my wife makes an important point, that pregnancy is a major reality check for the narcissistic female. For the 36-week pregnant woman, sitting in a complex docking procedure; breasts and bladder leak capriciously. Few see this as potentially alluring. Men experience no such stark reminder of our animal nature.

Narcissism does not wear well on men. In every species, one sex gets to preen, flash the gaudy feathers, puff out the air bladder, wear the makeup. I thought it was generally agreed that, for Homosapiens, women got the mirrors. But no, health clubs are lined with mirrors and are full of men, but it’s not health we’re seeking, but perfect bodies.

All this is rather discouraging for 50ish males like me, hoping to slip, or perhaps sink, into a comfortable, prolonged late middle age. Instead, I worry that society will keep raising the bar, prolonging adolescent self-absorption until it is banging up against retirement.

When they look back 50 years from now, historians will mark the turn of the century as the beginning of the end of male narcissism. Specifically, it was the introduction of finasteride to treat baldness in men. Finasteride inhibits the conversion of testosterone to dihydrotestosterone. It acts as an antiandrogen, and consequently can slow development of male pattern baldness. Under a different brand name, it is also peddled to reduce symptoms of prostatic hypertrophy.

There has also been a growing use of anabolic steroids to treat the symp-