

"The Cult of Thinness"

by Jennifer Flanagan

Ask a college woman if she's happy with herself and nine times out of ten, she'll tell you she needs to lose weight. Why are we, as a society, so consumed with body image? Who created the emaciated look that is considered to be ideal?

Ask a college woman who smokes why she doesn't quit. I've heard many young women tell me it's because they don't want to gain weight. Studies have shown that the average amount of weight a woman gains from quitting smoking is five pounds. Five pounds - that's it.

And yet, a woman would rather take years off her life span and risk getting any number of health complications than gain even five pounds. Why? Why would women prefer to deliberately contaminate their bodies rather than face the possibility of weight gain?

Almost every young woman I know has been on a diet in the past, is currently on a diet, or feels she should be on a diet. Young women talk of rationing their food, fasting to overcome guilt, wishing they were anorexic, and accepting bulimia as a part of everyday life. Why is

such obviously destructive behavior condoned in our society?

And what is this 'ideal' body? Pick up any women's magazine, watch any fashion show and you'll see it: tall, gaunt, flat-chested, narrow hiped with extremely prominent bones - this isn't reality, this is the 'beauty myth.'

This 'ideal' body has been created by men, for men. Women generally don't resemble the image being offered up by the Industry as 'beautiful.' Every time we see a beer commercial, every time we open a magazine, every time we watch men turn their heads at thinner women, this ideal is reinforced.

As often as we hear people say that super models are too thin, women are still expected to live up to this distorted standard for beauty.

It is a compliment to be told you have a hard body, and the slightest curvaceous flesh is considered flab. Have we forgotten that women's bodies are designed with the capability to bear children? The broader hips, the fleshy curve in the lower abdomen - these are biological facts of nature - not signs of imperfection.

All of these issues can be explained in terms of

women's relationships to men. A woman's self worth is not determined by herself; rather, it's decided by



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society, by how she perceives that men perceive her.

Ask a woman why she is losing weight and if she's honest with you, she'll tell you it's because she wants to

be more desirable to men. Either she wants to attract a certain man, or keep the one she has.

If a group of young women is sitting together, at a party, for example, and another woman whom they perceive to be better looking enters the room, the group of women feels threatened, jealous, intimidated and competitive toward her.

College women are notoriously petty and jealous with each other largely due to the fact that every woman sees every other woman as a possible threat. Women are constantly judging and comparing one another. If a woman is good looking and self confident she is considered by most women to be a bitch before they've even met her.

This could be why many women claim to get along with men better than women; the competition is too fierce.

There is something ironic about the fact that men created the 'ideal,' men help to perpetuate the 'ideal,' and women confirm this notion by jumping over themselves to knock each other out of the competition to attain that very 'ideal.' And for what - a man's attention? A man's approval?

"The Famine Within," a

documentary by Katherine Gilday dealing with this subject, makes the frighteningly accurate statement that "the cult of the body is the only coherent philosophy of self that women are offered in this society." Women have become obsessed with the "cult of thinness," allowing men to become our judges, as well as their own.

I wonder when this will stop: the jealousy and competition between women, the utter lack of acceptance of our own bodies, the struggle to achieve an impossible ideal.

I wonder when we will be allowed to decide our own self worth, based on our own criteria, rather than that handed to us by a patriarchal society which teaches only one doctrine: perfection.

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Turning the tables on inquiring minds

by Mike Royko

This is a press conference I'd love to watch, although I know I never will. But it's fun to think about.

"...and I conclude by saying that I am declaring my candidacy for my party's nomination for the office of president of the United States. Now, I will take questions."

"Governor, there have been rumors about your marriage, that you and your wife have had problems."

"I'll answer that this way. I doubt if any marriage has been without problems. For example, I have heard that your husband has been known to come home late at night, loaded to the gills. Crawls from the driveway to the front door on all fours. Pukes like a hog. Is there any truth in that?"

"Governor, I am not running for public office, so I don't believe that the state of my marriage is an issue."

"Maybe not, but it would still be fun to talk about. Let's face it, we all love a little gossip, right?"

"To get back to my question, governor. The rumors have persisted that at one time you and

your wife contemplated separation because you had an extramarital affair. Is that true?"

"That's really none of your business. Next question."

"Governor, don't you believe that the public has a right to know about conduct that might give insights into your character?"

"I'll make a deal. I'll tell you my secrets if you tell me yours. For instance, were you a virgin when you got married? Or are the rumors true that in your newsroom, they called you Miss Round Heels? And isn't it true that even now, while in a state of holy matrimony, it is rumored that you've engaged in hanky-panky with that pretty-boy weather reporter at your station? Does his wife know about it, or your husband, tsks, tsks?"

"Governor, if I may interrupt..."

"Yes George."

"I believe it is inappropriate for you to make allegations against members of the media who are simply doing their job in questioning you about your behavior in an effort to give voters an insight into your character. Questions you are evading."

"Who's evading? I just said it's none of your business. Just as it is none of my business why your wife dumped you. I mean, it would be an intrusion on your



private life if I asked if the rumors are true that she left you because she didn't like the way you dressed, especially when you dressed in her underwear and nightie. By the way, George, any truth in the scuttlebutt about your fondness for being spanked? Doesn't that sting?"

"Governor, that is a scurrilous statement."

"Nah, not really. If people

knew that you're a cross dresser and like being spanked, why they'd think you're more of an interesting character. By the way, if you wore a nightie while covering a story, the ratings would go up, I'll bet."

"Governor, are you saying that the public has no right to know about the private life of a public official? That they should be denied information that might give them insights into your trustworthiness, character and moral standards?"

"Good question, Ed. I'm saying that if, at some point in my life, I committed an indiscretion that was not of a criminal nature, as most people have done, what the heck does that have to do with balancing a budget, pushing through a legislative program, or vetoing a stupid bill? Now, some of us know that the owner of your newspaper is a notorious philanderer. I mean, does anyone really believe that when he spends two hours every afternoon with his office door locked, he is giving dictation to that buxom secretary? But do you ever rap on his door and say: 'Chief, what are you doing in there?' Do you ever yell through the keyhole: 'I

cannot work for a man with a character flaw such as yours.' Of course you don't. It's still a good newspaper, despite his notorious behavior. So why bug me about what I might or might not have done in my more frisky days?"

"Ah, governor, then you are admitting that you did sleep with someone other than your wife?"

"I didn't admit that any more than you will admit to the rumors that you have been known to sleep with a life-size, inflatable Barbie doll. Those things any fun?"

"That is a preposterous lie."

"Ah, then you deny sleeping with a blow-up doll?"

"I would not dignify such a question with a response."

"Ah-hah, then you don't deny it? Does that mean you admit it?"

"Governor, what are you trying to do?"

"I'm just working on my technique in case I lose the election."

"Your technique for what?"

"I might go into your line of work."

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