

## U.S. Trends in Feminine Beauty and Overadaptation

ALLAN MAZUR

Men place more importance on the physical attractiveness of women than women do on the physical attractiveness of men. As a result, women's social opportunities are more affected by their physical beauty than are men's, so that women are under more pressure to conform to an ideal of beauty. Although standards of female beauty are not as arbitrary as is sometimes claimed, they do vary greatly over time and across cultures. Modern institutions of advertising, retailing, and entertainment now produce vivid notions of beauty that change from year to year, placing stress upon women to conform to the body image currently in vogue. The best known of these beauty standards are the "bosom mania" of the 1950s and 1960s and the current trend toward slenderization. As women attempt to adapt to each of these changes, a minority overadapt, sometimes to the point of incapacitation. Among these overadaptations have been hysteria, early in the century, which was an exaggeration of the fragile feminine ideal of that time; bosom anxieties of the 1950s and 1960s, when women worried if their breasts were sufficiently large; and anorexia and bulimia today.

The words "anorexia" and "bulimia," barely known a decade ago, are now in common use to describe self-destructive eating habits, particularly of young women. Why has dietary abuse grown so rapidly as a problem, and why is it concentrated among young women? Answers may be found in our changing cultural image of the beautiful woman, now emphasizing a slender body with trim hips. Although many women diet to reach this slender ideal, some overadapt, starving themselves without realizing that they have passed beyond the point of optimal beauty. These tragic anorexics, as well as many "normal" women on extreme diet and exercise regimens, are the most recent example of a long-term phenomenon extending at least over the past

Allan Mazur, PhD, is a Professor in the Social Science Program at Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York. He appreciates the advice of Sidney Arenson, Ellen Berscheid, Randall Bond, Nancy Chodorow, Clive Davis, Jerry Jacobs, Douglas Kenrick, Judith Long, Denton Morrison, Eugene Rosa, Sheldon Stryker, and Donald Symons. The Atlantic City Free Public Library supplied data from its archive of Miss America Pageant yearbooks.

Requests for reprints should be sent to Allan Mazur, PhD, Social Science Program, Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York 13244-1090.

century when women have striven, often to dangerous lengths, to match the ever changing ideal of feminine beauty.

Why are women at more pains than men to suit the culture's image of a beautiful body? Both women and men can be sexually aroused by visual stimuli, but in virtually all natural situations, men are more likely than women to seek out and report appreciation of erotic images of the other sex (Symons, 1979). The erotica industry has catered primarily to a male market in the modern U.S., in earlier times, and in other societies. Several studies that have asked men and women to list the most attractive features of the other sex virtually always show men giving top choice to physical attributes, whereas women indicate preference for personality traits such as intelligence or sensitivity (Berscheid & Walster, 1974; Dion, 1981; Huston & Levinger, 1978). Fetishism, unusually high sexual arousal from the sight (or touch) of an inanimate object (often clothing), is found almost exclusively in males (Katchadourian & Lunde, 1975). Whether because of genetic differences, as Symons (1979) suggests, or a persistent bias in socialization, men are reliably more visually interested than are women in the bodies of the other sex. As a result, women are under more pressure than men to conform to an ideal of beauty because they quickly learn that their social opportunities are affected by their beauty, and a sense of beauty (or lack of it) becomes an important facet of a young woman's self-concept.

Precisely what do men find visually attractive about the female body? Charles Darwin (1874) concluded from his rudimentary cross-cultural survey that men judge the beauty of women by widely varying criteria and that there is no universal standard of beauty with respect to the human body. Cultural ideals of female beauty vary dramatically along the dimension of body weight, as may be seen from a survey of preliterate societies (Ford & Beach, 1951) as well as in the Western tradition of nude art (Clark, 1956, 1980; Gerdtts, 1974), with the currently slender woman of the West occupying the skinny end of this spectrum.

In cultures with changing clothing fashions, notions of the beautiful body often follow styles in costume (Hollander, 1978). Clothes have the important function of hiding certain parts of the body while exposing others, either as naked flesh or through form-fitted cloth. Until this century, women's fashions in the West totally concealed the lower body (Laver, 1963). Certain styles exposed shoulders and décolletage, while corseting and fitted bodices revealed the forms of waists and

busts; but the body below the waist was completely covered with bulky skirts, so the shapes of hips and legs were irrelevant to fashion. People had no opportunity to compare these lower parts from one woman to another, making it difficult to form consensual standards of beauty. Perhaps as a result, individual taste in the beauty of the lower body varied widely, even within the same broad culture. The lush, fleshy nudes of the Renaissance artist Titian (1477-1576) were drawn at nearly the same time as the slender erotic women of Lucas Cranach (1472-1553); the delightfully modern curves of Diego Valasquez's "Venus" (1599-1660) are nearly contemporary with Peter Paul Rubens' corpulent nymphs (1577-1640). Varying fat content of these models appears primarily below the waist, even Rubens' women having relatively small and firm breasts, for the bust was well displayed in public. But there were no agreed upon standards for hips and legs, which were so well hidden. The mere sight of one of these parts, even an ankle, seems to have been sexually arousing whatever its size or shape. A similar situation exists today regarding female genitalia, which have only recently become open to view on newsstands, so that we are just beginning to evolve specific standards of beauty for these parts.

In spite of the great variability in notions of beauty, there are commonalities that hold across cultures. The secondary sexual characteristics of young women, not only breasts and hips but general roundness rather than angularity, fleshiness rather than flaccidity, unblemished and smooth rather than saggy skin, and symmetry—these basic features are attractive in virtually all societies and are found in the erotic art of ancient cultures, though preferences differ for particular body parts, sizes and shapes (Clark, 1980; Ford & Beach, 1951; Symons, 1979). Reported exceptions to this pattern are rare and dubious. Thus, Darwin claimed that a man named Hearne reported that beauty to a Northern American Indian included "a clumsy hook nose, a tawny hide, and breasts hanging down to the belt" (1874, p. 578). Ford and Beach claimed that two of their sample of 60 preliterate societies, drawn from the Human Relations Area Files, preferred women with "long and pendulous breasts," these being the Ganda and Azande of East Africa (1951, p. 88). Rechecking the Area Files, I found the Ganda preference to be young women with "pendulant breasts." The Azande are indeed described by Larken (1926) as preferring "pendulous breasts," but Evans-Pritchard (1937), a more authoritative ethnographer, describes the preference as "full breasts."

Whatever geographic variability in beauty standards may have existed in earlier times, the rise of mass media in the 20th century, including the use of still and motion pictures, seems to have imposed more uniform standards of both beauty and fashion on Europe and the U.S. than existed previously. As clothing has become more revealing, we find numerous opportunities to judge feminine attractiveness in daily life. The rise of machine-produced clothing and mass retailing, promoted by extensive advertising, has produced a commercial conglomerate that successfully dictates changes in fashion to the industrialized world from year to year.

Laver (1963) notes that for most of human history, the clothes people wore were determined by where they lived, not by when they lived. If you stayed where you were, little changed, but if you moved to the next country, styles differed. Today the situation is reversed since we find the same fashions on both sides of the Atlantic, but these intercontinental styles change from year to year. The same is true of beautiful bodies, which are intimately related to fashion. In the next section I will describe changing trends in U.S. beauty, but modern Europe is similar. An examination of these trends will increase our understanding of complementary trends in overadaptive behavior that are related to the body.

### U.S. Trends in Feminine Beauty

The diverse images of beauty in the 19th century U.S. included two polar opposites which Banner (1983) calls the "steel engraving lady" and the "voluptuous woman." Both share the ubiquitous corseted waistline, down to an 18-inch circumference, if possible. Otherwise they differ in physique and personality, one being slight and frail, the other is heavy and robust.

The steel engraving lady, named for the lithography process which companies such as Currier and Ives used to illustrate her, is sylphlike and demure, a model of propriety who deserves the admiration and protection of men. As Banner (1983, p. 46) put it,

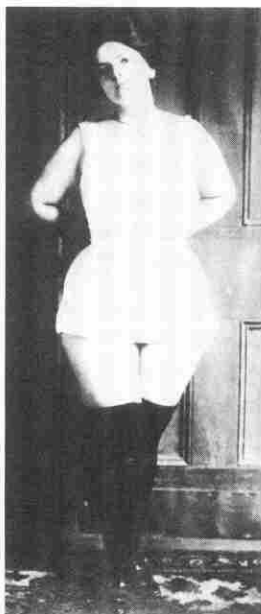
Her body is short and slight, rounded and curved. Her shoulders slope; her arms are rounded; a small waist lies between a rounded bosom and a bell-shaped lower torso, covered by voluminous clothing. Her hands are small, her fingers tapering. Her feet when they protrude, are tiny and delicate. When her pictorial representation is colored, her complexion is white, with a blush of pink in her cheeks.

Her label might better be "fragile" than "steel," for she was anything but that in strength and health. Part of her image was delicacy—sus-

ceptibility to damage, and it became fashionable to appear unhealthy. An observer of the time wrote that "the ill are studiously copied as models of female attractiveness" (cited in Banner, p. 51).

This fragile lady was admired for her propriety and social status, as well as her beauty, but by mid-century she was being challenged—at least for beauty—by a bustier, hipper, heavy-legged woman found in the lower classes, particularly among actresses and prostitutes. With the rising popularity of the theater in the U.S., voluptuous performers like Lillian Russell became modish, and as this full figure fit into the fleshy tradition in high European art, it gained sufficient stature to become briefly fashionable among the upper classes. At its height, in the 1880s, young U.S. women worried about being too thin. They used padding and they ate. "They are constantly having themselves weighed," wrote one observer of the day, "and every ounce of increase is hailed with delight" (Banner, 1983, p. 106). But the voluptuous woman could not escape her lower-class origins, and by the end of the century she had lost her vogue with the upper strata, returning to her bawdy beginnings. She is best known today from the quaint French postcards of the late 1800s, brazenly leering at us in all her heft (Gabor, 1972). Unfortunately these photographs do her little justice, for unlike artists' models of the time, she is shown in graceless, stable poses to accommodate the long film exposures that were necessary. Also, it was difficult to get beautiful models for erotic photographs, so the photographer had to make use of anyone who was willing, and he was unable to improve on nature as the artist did (Needham, 1972). However, the beauty of the model was not too important, for in those restricted times, the sight of any bare skin was exciting (Sullivan, 1980).

In the pre-World War I years, there was still a diversity of styles in feminine beauty. The heavy-bodied voluptuous woman was a favorite in burlesque and on the pages of the *National Police Gazette*, and Bellocq's (1970) photographs of New Orleans prostitutes, taken about 1912, display fat beauties who can still be appreciated today (Figure 1). Yet the first-known (and immediately popular) calendar nude, *September Morn*, which appeared in 1913 and is reproduced in Figure 2, shows a slender and delicate steel-engraving lady, demurely covering her body with her arms, unaware that we have violated her privacy (Gabor, 1972). These old favorites had recently been joined by a new girl, a fictitious beauty drawn for *Life* magazine by Charles Dana Gibson, one of the first of a line of popular illustrators who would influence



*Figure 1.* New Orleans prostitute photographed by E. Bellocq about 1912 (permission by Lee Friedlander).

---



*Figure 2.* "September Morn," by Paul Chabas (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Purchase, Mr. and Mrs. William Coxe Wright Gift, 1957 [57.89]).

---



*Figure 3. "Picturesque America Anywhere Along the Coast," 1901, by C. D. Gibson (picture collection, New York Public Library).*

the vision of feminine appeal in the U.S. (Downey, 1936; Gibson, 1969).

The Gibson Girl appeared about 1890, combining elements of the older beauties with features that were newly emerging (Figure 3). From the fragile lady, she took a basically slender line and a sense of respectability though not frail delicacy. From the voluptuous woman, she took a large bust and hips but no bawdiness. Following fashions of the moment, she piled her long hair on the top of her pretty head and wore corseting that shaped her chest into a "monobosom." She was one of the new athletic women who bicycled, exercised, and stood erect (though stylishly swaybacked); and she was emancipated, at least to the degree of entering the work force (Banner, 1983). Occasionally she wore swim and sports clothes which showed her slender legs, rounded calves, and gracefully narrow ankles (Gabor, 1972). Heretofore, proper U.S. women did not have legs.

The Great War ended an epoch in fashion as waistlines were let out and hemlines rose (Laver, 1963). Dresses of the 1920s, and the ideal bodies underneath, became curveless, almost boylike. The wasp waisted corset, now abandoned, was replaced by foundation garments that flattened the silhouette (Caldwell, 1981). But there are always continuities, and here it was slender legs, the Gibson Girl's legacy to



the flapper. A woman's physical attractiveness was now judged by her face (decorated with cosmetics) and exposed legs, all else being covered and formless (Rudofsky, 1974).

In the decade of the twenties, most homeowners bought a radio, and printed media-with-pictures proliferated. The U.S. had become sufficiently tied together by mass media and marketing networks that rapidly changing styles in clothes and bodies were becoming consensual, part of the homogeneous culture. Mass retail outlets, such as Sears catalog sales, limited buyers to a selection of the fashions of the moment. The 1900 Sears catalog showed only wasp waisted corsets that accentuated the bust; the 1923 catalog showed only curveless ones that suppressed the hips. Under these circumstances, fashions could change abruptly. The nation followed obediently (Laver, 1937).

Flapper beauty was remarkable for the near absence of female sexual characteristics, which probably ensured that the style would be short-lived. It ended with the "Crash." Immediately after 1930, hemlines fell and the narrow waist returned (Broby-Johansen, 1968). Female secondary sexual characteristics were reasserted. Although photographs of 1920s nudes often showed slender models with small breasts and subtle curves, the breasts and curves were more pronounced in the nudes and pinups of the 1930s (Gabor, 1972; Outerbridge, 1981; Ray, 1975, 1981; Smilby, 1981).

The developing erotic ideal of the time is well illustrated by George Petty's famous illustrations for *Esquire* magazine, beginning with the first issue in 1933 (Gabor, 1972). Unlike the respectable Gibson Girl, the Petty Girl was a promiscuous golddigger, derivative of the naughty twenties. Risqué curves have been added to the basically slender line of the flapper, but there is absolutely no superfluous fat. Her Gibson trim waist flows into slim hips, a small rear, and a taut abdomen, reflecting the new flat-stomach fashions (Probert, 1981). Hereafter, figure models would emulate her by sucking in their tummies. Her spherical breasts were firm but not very large, and they were separated, unlike the prewar "monobosom." Her focal feature is her legs, the erotic legacy of the flapper and the Gibson Girl, now very long with smooth muscles flexed by high heels or pointed toes.

The leg had come to equal, perhaps surpass, the breast as an erotic symbol. In hemmed stockings, with garters and high heels, it was a national fetish. During the 1940s, "nylons" would become a valued and salacious gift. A bathing-suited Betty Grable posed for one of the most popular pinups of World War II, looking back over her shoulder



as the camera recorded her "million dollar legs" and rear end (Figure 4). It is remarkable how sexless that picture looks to my informants today, particularly compared to another of the most popular pinups which emphasized negligee-clad Rita Hayworth's bust (Figure 5). The breast was to overwhelm the leg in postwar U.S.

Around 1940 *Esquire* changed illustrators, from George Petty to Alberto Vargas. Although no one artist or magazine can wholly shape the culture's standard of beauty, Vargas certainly reinforced the merging trend for the U.S. at war (Vargas & Austin, 1978). His saucy, muscular *Esquire* women were much like Petty's, but Vargas enlarged the spherical breasts, producing a magnificent caricature unlike any real women.

The preferred size of the U.S. bust grew continually from its flat period in the 1920s to the "bosom mania" of the 1960s, as the leg emphasis diminished. The increasing importance of the bust had been noted by serious observers in each decade (e.g., Laver, 1937; Kinsey,

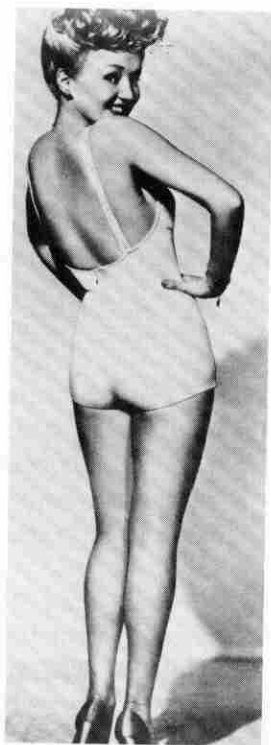


Figure 4. Betty Grable, 1942 (The Metropolitan Museum of Art).



*Figure 5. Rita Hayworth, photographed by Bob Landry, 1941 (permission by Frank Driggs).*

Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948; Winch, 1952; Morrison, 1965; Jesser, 1971). The trend may be observed in erotic pinup pictures, among Hollywood stars (Gabor, 1972), and in Miss America Pageant Yearbook statistics. The mean bust-waist-hips measurements of Miss America contest winners in the 1920s were 32-25-35, no winner having a larger bust than hips, similar to major Hollywood stars such as Clara Bow or Gloria Swanson. In the 1930s, mean measurements of Miss Americas were 34-25-35, one winner having a larger bust than hips; major film stars were Jean Harlow, Greta Garbo, and Marlene Dietrich, smallish busted women noted for their faces or legs. Miss America means in the 1940s were 35-24-35, with nearly half the winners having larger bust than hips; Hollywood had introduced "sweater girl" Lana Turner and buxom Jane Russell. Since 1950 there has been a norm of bust-hips symmetry, at least in the Miss America winners, nearly all of whom (79% as of 1982) had equal bust and hip measurements, usually 35 inches or a "perfect 36," and a 23 to 24 inch waist.

More detailed Miss America trends, from 1940 to 1984, appear in Figure 6. Mean measurements were calculated for each year's contestants, usually numbering about 50 though as low as 27 during World War II, and the raw trends were smoothed to eliminate erratic fluctuations by running successive 3-year medians (Tukey, 1977). It is unlikely that self-report data from contestants are completely accurate; however, purposive distortions were probably in the direction of

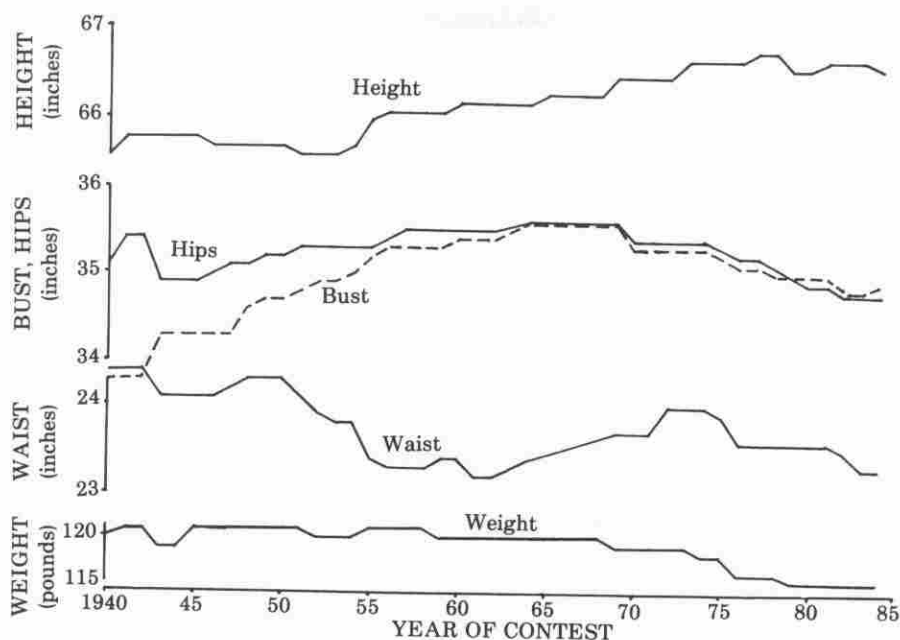


Figure 6. Body measurements of Miss America contestants, by year of contest (smoothed).

the body ideal of the day, so these biases enhance our ability to plot changing preferences.

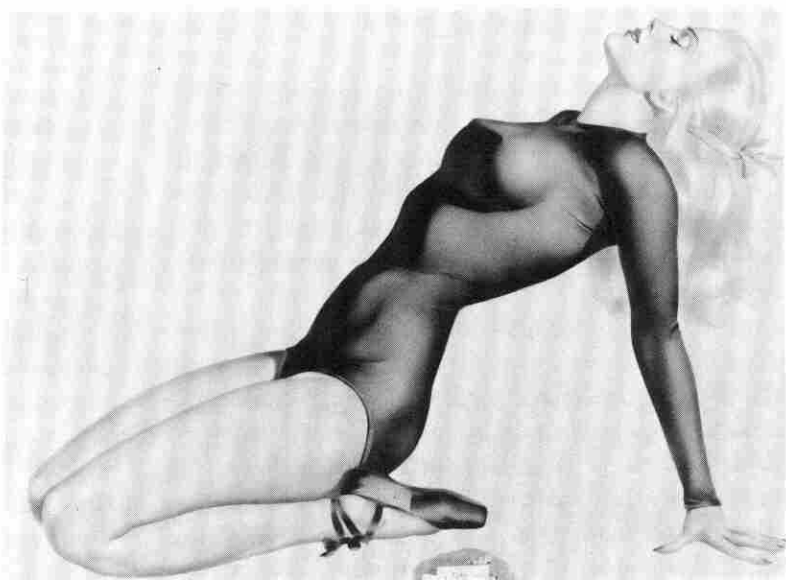
Contestant hips and especially busts grew continually from the 1940s to the mid-1960s, when they achieved the bust-hips symmetry found in Miss America winners since 1950. During this period waist size declined sharply, and by 1960, the ideal torso required conspicuous curvature, with fat redistributed away from the waist to hips and breasts. Legs were relatively less emphasized as elements of beauty.

During the 1950s, Hollywood and the fashion industry successfully promoted large cleaved bustlines (and falsies), tiny cinch waists (and girdles), and wiggly-hipped walks (with high heels). It was a period of "mammary madness" (Rosen, 1973) exemplified by *Playboy* magazine, which glorified large-breasted women (Weyr, 1978). Begun in 1953 as a sexy imitation of *Esquire*, *Playboy* aimed at the same college-educated audience and even hired ex-*Esquire* illustrator Vargas. Always adapting to the times, Vargas pinups across the decades illustrate the changing ideals of beauty. Compare his slender flapper of the 1920s (Figure 7) with his tautly curved *Esquire* girl of



*Figure 7. "Smoke Dreams," 1927, by Alberto Vargas (permission by Astrid Conte).*

---



*Figure 8. "Something for the Boys," 1943, by Alberto Vargas (Spencer Museum of Art, Lawrence, KS: The Esquire Collection).*

---



Figure 9. "The Apple Girl," 1955, by Alberto Vargas (permission by Astrid Conte).

the war years (Figure 8), and with his softer, bustier, and hipper woman of the *Playboy* period (Figure 9).

Each issue of *Playboy* featured a "Playmate of the Month" whose centerfold pictures probably became the most popular pinups in the world. It is impossible to judge the exact influence that *Playboy* and its imitative magazines had on the breast mania as they competed to show ever larger-breasted women in ever more blatant poses, but one study found that college men who preferred large to small busted women tended to be *Playboy* readers (Wiggins, Wiggins, & Conger, 1968). Many busty starlets who would eventually become Hollywood celebrities were first exposed in *Playboy*, including Marilyn Monroe at the early bloom of her movie career.

Monroe was the very first Playmate, appearing shockingly naked, even by the standards of "sophisticated" magazines at that time. She was not an extremely large-busted woman compared to later imitators like Jayne Mansfield. By luck she arrived in the early 1950s when preferred bust size was increasing but had not yet reached the huge proportions of later years. Had her debut been delayed, it might have been too late. She had the right features for the moment, and they were promoted by her film studio, *Playboy*, and other sympathetic media until her qualities were magnified into an aura that transcended the

evaluative standards of the times, even as larger breasts became admired.

### Slenderization

Like the 19th century, the 1950s had a slender as well as a voluptuous ideal of beauty, with bustless Grace Kelly and Audrey Hepburn the exemplars. They symbolized a subdued and classy sensuality, often associated with the aristocrat and high fashion, rather than the "earthy" sexuality of Monroe or Sophia Loren. Photographers explicitly distinguished fleshy figure models, for pinups, from thin fashion models (Tulchin, 1962), the latter regarded as too thin for the tastes of U.S. men.

In the years 1965-68, while movies and magazines bulged with bosoms, the Miss America Pageant stopped reporting bust-waist-hips measurements, but that did not allay feminist protests against the contest, particularly in 1968 during the bra burning fad. Shortly after 1969 when reporting of the measurements was resumed, the voluptuous figure began to recede, with bust and hips (still symmetrical) diminishing while contestants' height rose and their weight fell (refer to Figure 6). Similar trends have apparently affected the Miss USA contest, whose 22 finalists in 1983 and 1984 averaged 68 inches tall and 120 pounds. During the 1960s, when 120 pounds was the average weight of Miss America entrants, their corresponding height was only 66 inches. Compare this to New York's voluptuous Florodora chorus line of the 1900s, women chosen for their beauty, with their height of 64 inches, and their weight of 130 pounds (Banner, 1983).

Perhaps this trend toward slenderization, which continues today, was started by the feminists and sustained by gains in sexual equality (Morrison & Holden, 1974). More likely it was the *advertised* image of the emancipated woman as seen in *Cosmopolitan*, smoking Virginia Slims, making it on the job and with men, by having a stylishly slim figure.

There were other factors too. The big breast fell partly of its own weight as the media competed for larger women and finally displayed models whose humongous, sagging breasts provided some fetish appeal but more often probably elicited amused ridicule. Also, the mid-1960s was the time of the Beatles-led British invasion of U.S. pop culture, bringing the miniskirt which promoted the slender hips and slim legs of fashion models. The leg had returned in pantyhose rather than stockings and garters. Although U.S. men never adjusted to the

super skinniness of English model Twiggy, fuller fashion figures like Farrah Fawcett and Cheryl Tiegs did become new ideals, aided as usual by massive media hype (Aronson, 1983).

In 1970, *Penthouse*, *Playboy's* most successful imitator, became the first "class" magazine to introduce pubic hair to the centerfold, a trend soon joined by the other magazines and extended to photography of the genitalia (Gabor, 1972, 1982). *Penthouse* often chose thinner and less busty models than *Playboy*, perhaps to mitigate the gaudy display of private parts. The most profound effect of this new intimacy was to shift erogenous attention from above the waist to below it, a shift started by the miniskirt and later reinforced by designer jeans, their advertisements focused with explicit sexuality on the name-labeled denim-clad buttocks.

Even *Playboy*, the bastion of the bust, moved toward tall slender figures, increasingly emphasizing the lower torso. Mean body measurements, as reported for each year's 12 playmates, are shown in Figure 10 (updated from Garner, Garfinkel, Schwartz, & Thompson, 1980). Raw trends since 1959 have been smoothed by running successive 3-year medians, though large fluctuations remain, probably indicating vacillating editorial standards. Self-reported measurements may contain purposive distortions since they can affect the model's chances for selection as a Playmate. Nonetheless, recent changes noted among Miss America contestants appear here too. Playmates became taller during the 1970s. Bust and hips have become *generally* smaller, although with brief increases in the early 1970s (perhaps due to the newly tall models). The waist became larger during the 1970s, also probably due to taller models. Although not shown in Figure 10, the mean weight of playmates in the years 1979-83 is 111.5 pounds,  $SD = 9$ , significantly less than the 115.7 pound mean,  $SD = 10$  reported for the years 1959-78,  $p < .01$  (Garner et al.), whereas the 1979-83 playmates are .7 inches taller on the average.

These statistics show an increasingly linear Playmate, taller, leaner and nearly hipless, although many still appear large breasted in "cup size" if not bustline circumference. But amount of breast fat correlates with total body fat (Katch et al., 1980), and the cost of trim hips is a loss of fat and therefore firmness in the bust. Many of today's slim butted playmates have large breasts that droop compared to their plumper predecessors and certainly compared to the Vargas ideal. Apparently the cost of a trim rear is worth it, for according to *Playboy's* 1983 readers' survey, based on 65,000 men and 15,000 women who



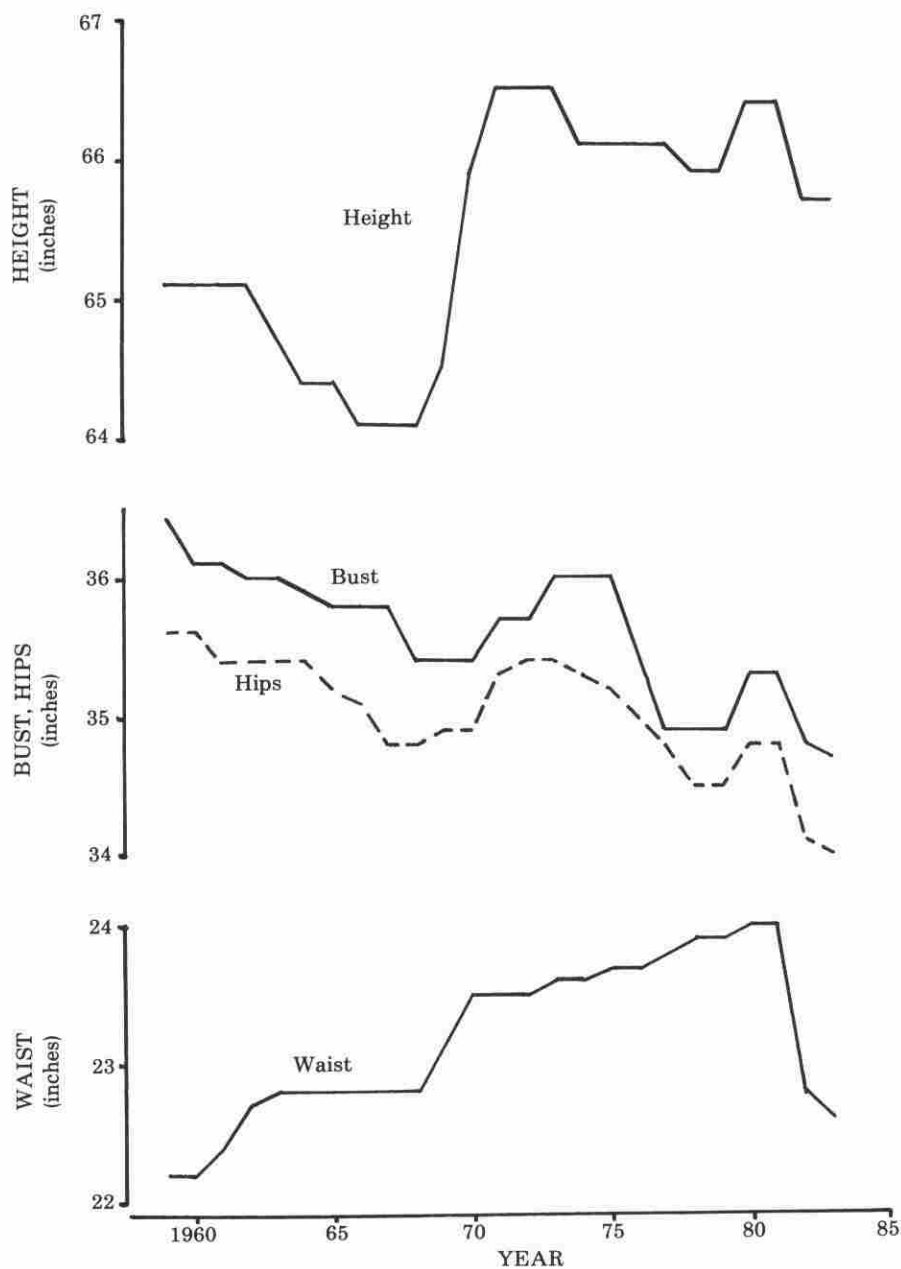


Figure 10. Body measurements of playmates, by year (smoothed).

mailed in a published questionnaire, nearly as many men report a woman's sexiest feature to be her "ass" (63%) as her breasts (67%); and only 28% of men (and 26% of women readers) think breast size is important to a woman's sexiness. At nearly the same time, a *Glamour* magazine nonrandom sample of 100 men ("Men Tell," 1983, April), when asked their favorite female body part, chose buttocks over breasts by more than two-to-one.

### Overadaptation

In pursuit of the new slender ideal, some women are dieting to a degree that is detrimental to their health. Actuarial statistics show that for maximum longevity, a woman 64 inches tall should weigh 124-138 pounds, and a woman 67 inches tall should weigh 133-147 pounds (assuming medium frame and ages 25-59; Seligmann, 1983). By these criteria, beauty queen standards of the 1900s are healthier than those of today.

Women have perennially reported more dissatisfaction with their bodies than men, and they have commonly turned to diet, at least since the 1920s (Clifford, 1971; Huenemann, Shapiro, Hampton, & Mitchell, 1966; Jourard & Secord, 1955; Wooley, Wooley, & Dyrenforth, 1979). As large bosoms became increasingly desirable, the importance of dieting lessened, particularly as improved foundation garments permitted corrections to the natural figure (Caldwell, 1981; Probert, 1981). In the late 1960s, erogenous attention began to shift from the large bust to the trim lower torso, reasserting the need to diet, especially as new clothing fashions—brief, sheer, and close fitting—prohibited heavy reliance on foundation lingerie. The growth during the 1970s of diet and exercise industries, largely to promote slender rear ends, is well known. Cultural pressure to conform to this slimhipped ideal was probably unprecedented with its agents being the growing media, entertainment, advertising, fashion, and retail industries.

By the early 1970s, the primacy of the bosom had given way to the bottom. Women, asked during the last decade to judge the attractiveness of female bodies, usually preferred slender figures, small buttocks, and middle to small size busts (Beck, Ward-Hull, & McLearn, 1976; Horvath, 1979, 1981). When asked to comment on their *own* bodies, diverse samples of women usually complain that they are too heavy and their hips and rears are too big, but *not* that their busts are too small; and most women (but few men) are dieting (Berscheid,

Walster, & Bohrnstedt, 1973; Lerner, Orlos, & Knapp, 1976; Miller, Coffman, & Linke, 1980). I obtained similar results in small unpublished surveys of students taken at Syracuse University (Mazur, 1980-82) and Rosa also did so at Washington State University (Rosa, 1983).<sup>1</sup> Bras to reduce the apparent size of the bustline, reminiscent of the 1920s, reappeared in retail advertising during the 1980s.

The rising incidence of anorexia nervosa and bulimia among adolescent girls and young women since the early 1970s has been widely noted (Sours, 1980). Anorexics starve themselves in the mistaken impression that they are too heavy and must lose weight; bulimics binge on food and then guiltily purge themselves through induced vomiting or with laxatives (Boskind-Lodahl, 1976; Dally, Gomez, & Issacs, 1979). Only a small porportion of young women deviate from normal behavior to this extreme, with certain personalities and situations predisposing some women more than others (Dally et al.; Yates, Leehey, & Shisslak, 1983). Nonetheless, there is little doubt that the overall trend in self-starvation has been produced by our culture's increasing idealization of slenderness as the model for feminine beauty (Garner et al., 1980; Polhemus, 1978).

The recent rise in anorexia and bulimia is precisely analogous to the obsessive anxiety of some women during the 1950s and 60s over the "inadequate" bosoms, a worry that has now receded. All of these neurotic concerns result when the contemporary ideal is pushed to its extreme. They wax and wane as the culture first adopts and then abandons a particular paradigm of beauty. Most women try to adapt, and some overadapt.

Other overadaptations are associated with the earlier ideal of the fragile steel-engraving lady, whose image of frail delicacy was always susceptible to real or imagined disease. Catharine Beecher's survey of mid-nineteenth century U.S. women found "a terrible decay of female health all over the land" (cited in Shorter, 1982, p. 276). Whether these gynecological ailments were due to emotional or organic causes is under dispute (Shorter). I opt for both etiologies, but it is the psychic one that is of concern here.

The fragile lady's emotional malaise is better known from European than American exemplars, including the slender and beautiful Natasha, heroine of *War and Peace*. Tolstoy's description of her illness, after the breaking of her engagement to Prince Andrei, seems as

<sup>1</sup>The unpublished surveys are available from the author.

expert an account of psychosomatic distress as one could find today (1968, pp. 789-792). We also have Freud's case studies of his hysteria patients, usually respectable young women who were the mainstay of his practice (Breuer & Freud, 1957). In classic Freudian hysteria, a physical malady has an underlying psychic cause; for example, a woman with a paralyzed limb may show full usage under hypnosis only to lose it again when she awakens. Classical hysteria is the extreme of overadaptation for the fragile woman, for with it she carries the ideal of beauty to the point of incapacitation, just as some women today starve (and die) to epitomize their modern sense of beauty.

Surveying the various female maladies that, over the centuries, have been called hysteria, Veith (1965) writes,

[T]hroughout history the symptoms [of hysteria] were modified by the prevailing concept of the feminine ideal. In the nineteenth century, especially young women and girls were expected to be delicate and vulnerable both physically and emotionally. . . . Perhaps because of this emotional vulnerability there was a striking rise in the prevalence of hysteria throughout Europe [in the Victorian period]. Concurrent with its proliferation, which reached almost epidemic proportions, the malady exhibited a diminution in severity, and the disabling symptoms gave way to the faintings, whims, and tempers so elegantly designated as vapors. (pp. 209-210)

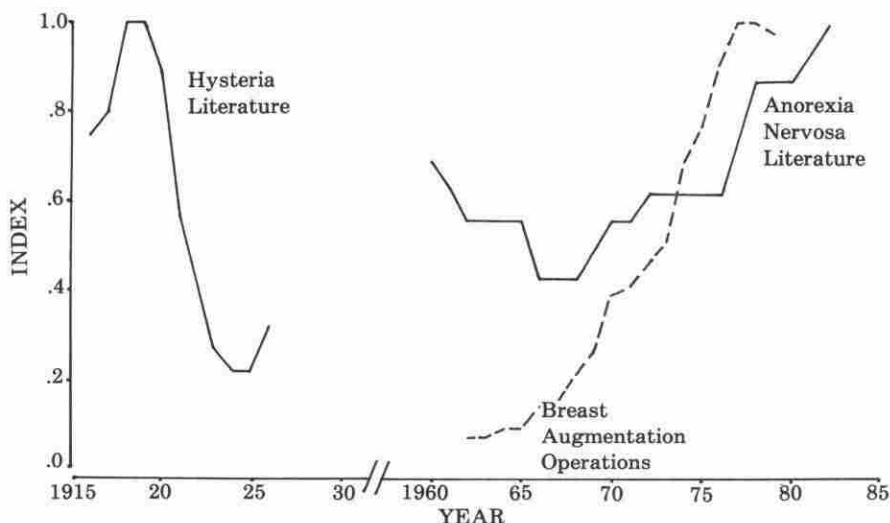


Figure 11. Indices of hysteria, breast augmentation, and anorexia nervosa, by year (smoothed).

Approximate trends in beauty overadaptation during this century are shown in Figure 11. Cosmetic breast-enlargement surgery is used as an indicator of extreme concern over small bust size, assuming that periods of rising surgical demand are times when bosom anxieties are high, and women are willing to subject themselves to the chancy outcomes of this elective procedure. Although national data on cosmetic mammoplasty are not available, Biggs, Cukier, and Worthing (1982) report the yearly number of augmentation mammoplastics at their clinic from 1962 through 1979, totaling 1,496 procedures, not including patients who have undergone mastectomy. This is a major clinic, having introduced silicone implants into mammoplasty, and is assumed to reflect the national trend. For ease of comparison with other indicators in Figure 11, each year's number of cases was converted into a proportional index score, defined so that the busiest year's caseload is scored 1.0.

Yearly counts of hysteria and anorexia cases are less accessible, so I have constructed indices of the yearly medical *publications* on the topics, recognizing that these reflect changes in medical labeling and specialization as well as the incidence of maladies. The number of articles listed under "Hysteria" in the *Quarterly Cumulative Index* was counted for each year of its publication (1916-26). The yearly article count under "Anorexia Nervosa" was taken from the *Cumulated Index Medicus*, beginning with its first volume in 1960. Since both reference works expanded over their years of publication to cover the expanding medical literature, I divided each year's article count by the total number of pages in that volume, to control for the larger number of journals being cited from year to year. Finally, each ratio of article count to volume page was converted to a proportional index score, defined so that the highest yearly ratio was scored 1.0. All trends have been smoothed by running successive 3-year medians.

The hysteria literature, which could only be plotted since 1916, shows a peak of concern with wartime cases, but more relevant here is the general decline into the 1920s, when the fragile lady (and other beauty ideals) was replaced by the indelicate flapper, and classical hysteria apparently ceased to be a manifestation of femininity.

The demand for breast augmentation surgery began in the 1950s, though our series begins in 1962 with the introduction of silicone implants, which greatly improved the operation and facilitated its rapid spread. By the late 1970s, demand for augmentation had leveled. The series ends with 1979, so we cannot tell if demand subsequently

declined, as one would expect given the culture's recent decline in bust emphasis. Since the late 1970s, the journal *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery* has shown rising interest in breast reduction, and most recently there is increasing activity in hip, thigh, and rear reduction.

Popular media often suggest that anorexia nervosa was nearly unheard of until recently (e.g., Fadiman, 1982), though in fact, active research on the topic extends back to at least the beginning of our index in 1960. There was a lull in publications after 1965, probably reflecting the de-emphasis on dieting at the height of the bosom mania and then rapid growth in the index since the end of the 1960s, accompanying the cultural trend toward slenderization, which continues today.

All of these examples of extremism—self-starvation, inordinate concern with one's bosom, hysteric symptoms—have afflicted young women, but rarely men, during particular periods of history. In a sense, these are simply different versions of the same problem, an overcommitment to that cultural ideal of beauty that is in vogue at the moment. There is no clear boundary between adaptation and overadaptation. For every bosom "neurotic" there were many plain worriers; for every anorexic there are numerous perpetual dieters. It would be interesting to know if those personality traits and situations that predispose a modern young woman toward anorexia are similar to those that predisposed Freud's patients toward hysteria. In any case, the overriding cultural pressure toward adaptation to an ideal of beauty is similar for women in each era.

## References

- ARONSON, S. (1983). *Hype*. New York: Morrow.
- BANNER, L. (1983). *American beauty*. New York: Knopf.
- BECK, S., WARD-HULL, C., & MCLEAR, P. (1976). Variables related to women's somatic preferences of the male and female body. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 34, 1200-1210.
- BELLOCO, E. (1970). *Storyville portraits*. New York: Museum of Modern Art.
- BERSCHIED, E., & WALSTER, S. (1974). Physical attractiveness. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 7, pp. 157-215). New York: Academic Press.
- BERSCHIED, E., WALSTER, E., & BOHRNSTEDT, G. (1973, November). Body image. *Psychology Today*, pp. 119-131.
- BIGGS, T., CUKIER, J., & WORTHING, L. (1982). Augmentation mammoplasty: A review of 18 years. *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery*, 69, 445-450.

- BOSKIND-LODAHL, M. (1976). Cinderella's stepsisters: A feminist perspective on anorexia nervosa and bulimia. *Signs*, 2, 342-356.
- BREUER, J., & FREUD, S. (1957). *Studies in hysteria* (J. Strachey, Trans.). New York: Basic Books.
- BROBY-JOHANSEN, R. (1968). *Body and clothes*. London: Faber and Faber.
- CALDWELL, D. (1981). *And all was revealed: Ladies underwear 1907-1980*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- CLARK, K. (1956). *The nude: A study in ideal form*. New York: Pantheon.
- CLARK, K. (1980). *Feminine beauty*. New York: Rizzoli.
- CLIFFORD, E. (1971). Body satisfaction in adolescence. *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 33, 119-125.
- DALLY, P., GOMEZ, J., & ISSACS, A. (1979). *Anorexia nervosa*. London: William Heinemann Medical Books.
- DARWIN, C. (1874). *The descent of man*. London: John Murray.
- DION, K. (1981). Physical attractiveness, sex roles and heterosexual attraction. In M. Cook (Ed.), *The bases of human sexual attraction* (pp. 3-22). New York: Academic Press.
- DOWNY, F. (1936). *Portrait of an era*. New York: Scribner's.
- EVANS-PRITCHARD, E. (1937). *Witchcraft, oracles and magic among the Azande*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- FADIMAN, A. (1982, February). The skeleton at the feast. *Life*, pp. 62-76.
- FORD, C., & BEACH, F. (1951). *Patterns of sexual behavior*. New York: Harper & Row.
- GABOR, M. (1972). *The pin-up*. New York: Bell.
- GABOR, M. (1982). *The illustrated history of girlie magazines*. New York: Harmony Books.
- GARNER, D., GARFINKEL, P., SCHWARTZ, D., & THOMPSON, M. (1980). Cultural expectations of thinness of women. *Psychological Reports*, 47, 483-491.
- GERDTS, W. (1974). *The great American nude*. New York: Praeger.
- GIBSON, C. (1969). *The Gibson girl and her America*. New York: Dover.
- HOLLANDER, A. (1978). *Seeing through clothes*. New York: Viking.
- HORVATH, T. (1979). Correlates of physical beauty in men and women. *Social Behavior and Personality*, 7, 145-151.
- HORVATH, T. (1981). Physical attractiveness: The influence of selected torso parameters. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 10, 21-24.
- HUENEMANN, R., SHAPIRO, L., HAMPTON, M., & MITCHELL, B. (1966). A longitudinal study of gross body composition and body conformity and their association with food and activity in a teenage population. *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 18, 325-338.
- HUSTON, T., & LEVINGER, G. (1978). Interpersonal attractions and relationships. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 29, 115-156.
- JESSER, C. (1971). Reflections on breast attention. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 7, 13-25.
- JOURARD, S., & SECORD, P. (1955). Body cathexis and the ideal female figure. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 50, 243-246.
- KATCH, V., CAMPAIGNE, B., FREEDSON, F., SADY, S., KATCH, F., & BEHNKE, A. (1980). Contribution of breast volume and weight to body fat distribution in females. *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*, 53, 93-100.
- KATCHADOURIAN, H., & LUNDE, D. (1975). *Fundamentals of human sexuality* (2nd ed.). New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- KINSEY, A. E., POMEROY, W. B., & MARTIN, C. E. (1948). *Sexual behavior in the human male*. Philadelphia: Saunders.
- KUNZLE, D. (1982). *Fashion and fetishism*. Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield.



- LARKEN, F. (1926). An account of the Zande. *Sudan Notes and Records*, 9, 1-55.
- LAVER, J. (1937). *Taste and fashion*. London: George Harrap.
- LAVER, J. (1963). *Costume through the ages*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- LERNER, R., ORLOS, J., & KNAPP, J. (1976). Physical attractiveness, physical effectiveness and self-concept in late adolescents. *Adolescence*, 11, 313-326.
- Men tell what they love [100]. (1983, April). *Glamour*, pp. 238-241.
- MILLER, T., COFFMAN, J., & LINKE, R. (1980). Survey on body image, weight, and diet of college students. *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 77, 561-566.
- Miss America Pageant. (Various years). Atlantic City: Miss America Pageant.
- MORRISON, D. (1965). *Fashions in female breasts*. Unpublished manuscript, Michigan State University, Sociology Department, East Lansing, MI.
- MORRISON, D., & HOLDEN, C. (1974). The burning bra. In Marcello Tuzzi (Ed.), *Sociology for pleasure* (pp. 345-362). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- NEEDHAM, G. (1972). Manet, 'Olympia' and pornographic photography. *Art News Annual*, 38, 80-89.
- OUTERBRIDGE, P. (1981). *A singular aesthetic*. Laguna Beach, CA: Laguna Beach Museum of Art.
- Playboy readers' sex survey: Part I. (1983, January). *Playboy*, pp. 108, 241-250.
- POLHEMUS, T. (1978). *The body reader*. New York: Pantheon.
- PROBERT, C. (1981). *Lingerie in Vogue since 1910*. New York: Abbeville Press.
- RAY, M. (1975). *Man Ray photography 1920-1934*. New York: East River Press.
- RAY, M. (1981). *Man Ray photographs*. New York: Thames and Hudson.
- ROSEN, M. (1973). *Popcorn Venus*. New York: Avon.
- RUDOFKY, B. (1974). *The unfashionable human body*. New York: Anchor.
- SELIGMANN, J. (1983, March 14). Keep your double chins up. *Newsweek*, p. 65.
- SHORTER, E. (1982). *A history of women's bodies*. New York: Basic Books.
- SMILBY, F. (1981). *Stolen sweets*. New York: Playboy Press.
- SOURS, J. (1980). *Starving to death in a sea of objects*. New York: Jason Aronson.
- SULLIVAN, C. (Ed.) (1980). *Nude photographs 1840-1980*. New York: Harper and Row.
- SYMONS, D. (1979). *The evolution of human sexuality*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- TOLSTOY, L. (1968). *War and peace*. New York: New American Library.
- TUKEY, J. (1977). *Exploratory data analysis*. Reading, MA: Addison Wesley.
- TULCHIN, L. (1962). *Photographing the nude*. New York: A. S. Barnes.
- VARGAS, A., & AUSTIN, R. (1978). *Vargas*. New York: Crown.
- VIETH, I. (1965). *Hysteria: The history of a disease*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- WEYR, T. (1978). *Reaching for paradise*. New York: Time Books.
- WIGGINS, J., WIGGINS, N., & CONGER, J. (1968). Correlates of heterosexual somatic preferences. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 10, 82-90.
- WINCH, R. (1952). *The modern family*. New York: Holt.
- WOOLEY, O., WOOLEY, S., & DYRENFORTH, S. (1979). Obesity and women—II. A neglected feminist topic. *Women's Studies Institute Quarterly*, 2, 81-92.
- YATES, A., LEEHEY, K., & SHISLAK, C. (1983). Running—an analogue of anorexia? *New England Journal of Medicine*, 308, 251-255.

Accepted for publication August 10, 1984