

OTHER VOICES

Let's drop this obsession with the 'perfect body'

By Nilly Barr

America is a nation that is a world leader in so many ways. Sadly, we are also leading the way in an obsession with food, weight, sex and beauty.

Over thousands of messages pummel our youth 24 hours a day — making them obsessed with idealized body images and airbrushed supermodels. Alarming new trends such as breast implants and tummy tucks are becoming a norm as money spent on diet fads, cosmetic surgery and body alterations continues to increase dramatically among young women.

Last year alone, Americans spent \$60 billion to lose weight. These figures don't even account for all of the "free" ways individuals invested in weight loss including restricting, purging and over-exercis-

ing. And to what avail?

This obsession with being thin, this obsession toward achieving the "perfect body" has led us to become a culture inundated with ever-increasing rates of eating disorders, anxiety, depression and addiction.

Our nation's focus on body types and weight equaling beauty is not a new concept, but one that stretches back to the 1880s. At this time, women were expected to squeeze into corsets and maintain petite waists. In the 1950s, Marilyn Monroe's hour glass figure was the body type women coveted.

Then came the 1960s and the onset of Twiggy, the world's first super model who made skinny, "inny." Just a decade later in the 1970s, women were motivated to attain the athletic physique demonstrated by Cindy Crawford.

GUEST COLUMN



Nilly Barr is a licensed professional counselor with a master's of science in counseling psychology from the University of Tennessee. She lives in Greenville and has been in practice for 25 years.

Now, women are expected to flaunt a waif-like body with no wrinkles or blemishes.

The question we should all be asking ourselves, regardless of the era in which we live, is this: How is it safe for women to alter their physical makeup through extreme measures, in order to fulfill the changing expectations of what is considered "beautiful"?

It is not safe, and creates a cycle of emotional, psychological and physical hurt.

Our obsession with "beauty" is clearly apparent in our shifting standards of the perfect body — what's worse is that this trap of perfection is an impossibility toward which women of all ages and ethnic backgrounds are striving.

The results are disturbing. Nearly 78 percent of 17-year-olds have a negative body image; an astounding 65 percent of women and girls have eating disorders brought

on by this desire to be deemed "beautiful" as society implies.

My appeal is this: we must step up as a society and say *no* to this cycle of insanity and hurt, and *yes* to loving our bodies as nature intended. We must choose to focus on human value — not on outward appearance, but on inherent value.

Our nation must stop defining the standards of "beauty," and instead live by our stated values — to honor every human being not as an object, but as a precious and unique life, each beautiful in its own way.

One of my colleagues once said, "The past is the best indicator of the future." While I believe this to be true, I also believe that in no way should the past determine the future.

We have the power to make informed choices regarding the messages

that we live by. We have a hand in determining our future. Let us use this knowledge to hold ourselves to a higher standard of beauty and humanity.

Eating disorders have become an alarming trend in women of all ages today. In an effort to provide a retrospective look at the "perfect" female form, I invite you to visit and reflect on the "Body Lines" exhibit at Coffee Underground at any time during the month of February. My hope is that you will leave encouraged and renewed — while times will change just as fashions do, you are beautiful as you are.

For more information on this unique exhibit presented by Eating Disorder Professionals, please contact Lynn Victory at 864-631-1035 or Nilly Barr at 864-271-2740 or nbarr@charter.net.