

Appearance Obsession, by any other name

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I'm continuously amazed at how the marketing machine turns perfectly laudable goals, like 'health,' into tools to sell products. I shouldn't be surprised, just like the cat shouldn't be surprised every time the garage door goes up, but he is and I am. Call it naivete or cluelessness but, to me, twisting a face lift into 'anti-aging', slimming clothes into 'health' and an air-polluting car into 'freedom' seem a bit disingenuous.

Health: I had hopes that *Health Magazine* would actually promote health. But it has turned out to be just another women's rag mag. It camouflages appearance and weight obsessions with liberal smatterings of the word 'health'. Not one article addresses men's or children's health. Too many articles and innumerable advertisements deal with make-up, fat lips and pedicures. Do those subjects really relate to health??? Try as I might, I just can't extrapolate "Gorgeous lips in minutes with our TOP picks for luscious lips" to *real* health ... as in live-longer-with-less-disease.

Not one article in the September 2007 issue suggests that it's OK to be female and curvy. Over 50% of *Health's* pages, including ads, focus on weight loss, without comment about who should and shouldn't slim down. The "Style Tricks For Slimmer Hips" uses Kate Winslet, Kelly Clarkson and Tyra Banks, all of whom sport full, gorgeous bodies and proud-of-it attitudes, to show you how to dress to look thin. How *could* they go over to the dark side?? E

Even the "What Looks Great On Your Shape" article merely 'helps' 3 very normal women to lengthen the waist, slim and draw the eye away from the hips, lengthen legs, skim over curves and emphasize cleavage. If you fail at *being* thin, then at least buy clothes to look the part, and, you know, be *healthy*.

Anti-Aging: My email box fills with ads for 'Anti-aging' seminars where I could learn procedures and potions to make even tobacco-wrinkled, muscle-atrophied, hacking, vomiting bodies look young. That way they can look in the mirror and see young while they are dying. Belief in the delusion that appearance equals age just validates and

perpetuates the marketing ploy. Do a shrink-wrapped face and buttock implants really equate to a younger being? No: The true rejuvenators are balanced diets, walks around the block, equanimity and peaceful sleep. But they won't be marketed as 'anti-aging.'

Colin Fletcher, the father of modern backpacking, died in June. When doctors cared for him in 2001 after he was hit by a car, they noted that his legs looked like those of a muscular 30 year-old, not the 79 year-old that he was. That sounds like health *and* appearance. Too bad that most people think of exercise as something to do to lose weight, rather than to promote both health and anti-aging.

