

28/08/1997

## Debunking West's notion of beauty

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WHO determines how slim a woman should be to look good? Whose standard decides? No one knows for sure.

But fingers are pointing at the West for its constant promotion of what the ideal body should be, often projecting lanky models as perfect examples.

A very influential foreign fashion magazine recently tried to popularise the drug-addict and anorexic look, complete with black-ringed eye make-up and unkempt hairdo. The pictures of skeletal-thin models infuriated women's groups all over the United States who jumped on the magazine for its insensitivity.

Their fight paid off; the magazine discontinued its promotion of the new look, but not after a famous photographer who introduced the prospective fad died of a drug overdose.

Indeed the media - both Western and local - plays an important role in influencing a woman's self-esteem. But this should not be the case as a woman should always be comfortable with her appearance and not let others dictate how she should look.

At a recent self-esteem campaign entitled "Love Your Body, Love Yourself", jointly organised by the Body Shop and Women's Aid Organisation, guest-of-honour Datuk Paduka Marina Mahathir advised women to be more confident with their appearance.

She said it was time for women to break away from the brainwashing notion that beautiful only means slim, propagated by the West.

"We need to do away with such an unhealthy mindset. These are ridiculous standards that have been imposed on us and we need not conform to them. But it is sad that some women go for form over substance and end up spending too much time on the exterior."

Marina said that while it is not wrong to want to improve one's appearance, the individual should only work towards looking her best and not someone else's best.

"Personally, I feel we don't need to go to such lengths as lightening our hair, skin, or putting on coloured contact lenses. At times, we may end up looking like someone from outer space. The best is to be comfortable with one's self."

Marina, who is president of the National AIDS Foundation, concluded that women needed to re-examine themselves, feel more positive about their appearance, have higher self-esteem and feel more empowered with what they have achieved.

Earlier, Body Shop managing director Mina Cheah-Fong said women needed facts that would help them feel good, and not overwrought opinions that make them diet excessively.

"Most of us don't look perfect and that is actually fine. But we have been taught to despise bulges, stretch marks and wrinkles," she said.

At the event, participants and shoppers were introduced to a huge poster of Ruby, a representation of a woman happy and confident with herself and Body Shop's answer to Barbie.

Guests later penned their thoughts on the poster. A sample: "I'm the broad!", "I'm 40 and unfit, but I'm having the time of my life", "I'm fat, healthy and I climb mountains", "I am woman, hear me roar!"

Also present were Sungei Way Group president Tan Sri Dr Jeffrey Cheah's wife Puan Sri Susan Cheah, executive director of Women's Aid Organisation

Ivy Josiah and New Straits Times features editor Aishah Ali.  
(END)