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[BEAUTY & FASHION]

SATISFACTION FROM YOUR REFLECTION



By Mary Jo DiLonardo

It's hardly a surprise when a supermodel appears on a magazine cover in a swimsuit. But when the model is Tyra Banks and she's carrying 30 extra pounds from her peak posing days, eyebrows go up.

Banks was snapped in some relatively unflattering shots by the paparazzi on the beach and, of course, the photos immediately hit the tabloids. At 5'10" and 161 pounds, the ex-model looks great. Yet critics were quick to label her as "fat," making normal women everywhere give up in despair.

Banks fought back, making the round of the talk shows and posing for the cover of *People* in a bright red swimsuit with the headline, "You Call This Fat?"

"I get so much mail from young girls who say, 'I look up to you, you're not as skinny as everyone else, I think you're beautiful,'" she said. "So when they say that my body is 'ugly' and 'disgusting,' what does that make those girls feel like?"

Thanks to an ever-increasing battle against the picture-perfect images that the media displays and women have come to expect, women are becoming more and more comfortable with what they see in the mirror. It's tough because we get conflicting messages.

"There's at least one women's magazine that always has a picture of a cake on the cover yet there's always a story about diet inside," points out Marla Cilley, co-author of The New York Times bestseller, *Body Clutter: Love Your Body, Love Yourself*.

What are women supposed to think? Bake the cake but, heaven forbid you actually eat it?

Self-esteem is approached from a back-door method, says clinical psychologist Nancy O'Reilly, founder of *The WomenSpeak Project*, an online research site about women's issues. "Stay young and beautiful. If not, women suffer the belief that they are at fault if they are not successful in matching up with the images they see each day on the tube."

Every day, women are barraged with images of perfect faces and perfect bodies smiling and posing from magazine covers and television commercials. They're models and actresses so ideally formed that they can make the rest of the normal female world cringe when they see their reflections.

Dove first earned accolades with a "Real Women" campaign featuring, well, real women. They came in all shapes and sizes. Nike soon followed with ads celebrating tomboy knees and thunder thighs. When the Dove ads hit, consumers - especially women - were immediately hooked.

"Finally! That was a word we heard over and over again. It was as if we lifted the lid off of a Pandora's Box," said Maureen Shirreff of advertising agency Ogilvy & Mather, who was creative director of the Dove campaign.

"The goal of Campaign For Real Beauty was to provoke a debate and that's exactly what happened and continues today. The debate centered around the question: Has the definition of beauty been too narrowly defined? And could it be made larger? More inclusive? The debate has its naysayers, but the overwhelming majority of women have truly and with great passion embraced what Dove is doing."

In Tyra's case, a high-profile real woman also went to war.

"The easiest way the media can control or handle a strong powerful woman is by resorting to damaging comments about her weight. It is women's Achilles heel," says Jessica Weiner, self-esteem expert for the Tyra Banks Show and author of *Life Doesn't Begin 5 Pounds From Now*.

"Tyra at least used her platform to fight back and speak up. And it sent a strong message to women that we are all responsible for decoding the images we see and to not believe the hype."

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