



OPINION

THE CANADIAN CHAMPION

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Don't buy body stereotypes

There's a new movement afoot in the body image game. Instead of encouraging everyone to change the way they look, therapies are now encouraging people to accept it.

While adolescent girls are one of the groups most unhappy about their body image, many other new groups are joining the body image craze. Recent studies by psychologist Thomas Cash, at Old Dominion University in the United States, suggest half of all people are unhappy about what they see in the mirror.

Many are to the point of being quite self-conscious in social situations. This compares to 36 per cent who disliked their appearance in the 1980s and only 19 per cent in the 1970s. The trend is growing.

The fastest growing groups of body conscious people are middle-aged moms and dads. Mary is a good example, a 33 year old office receptionist who is attractive by any standards but her own.

She had a baby two years ago and thinks she has huge hips and thighs, not to mention crooked teeth that ruin her smile. She avoids the pool, the weight room and other body-conscious places like the plague. She spends a lot of money on loose fitting clothes, thinking that they will hide the fat. She's always looking for that subtle rejection in the other person's reaction, and she finds rejection where none exists.

Enter the eight step good body image program. Programs run by body image professionals stress several important strategies. First, they use diaries and discussion to find out what triggers bad feelings.

Second, when a person discovers what situations cause them to get down on themselves, those situations can be translated into goals for change. If they can't be put themselves down when they are not being listened to at work, they will be taught assertiveness skills.

If they feel upset when people stare or tease them, they will learn to take stock in the friends they have rather than giving so much power to those they don't have. Third, people gain a lot of new information about body image. Your body build is primarily genetic, and even weight control is much more difficult to manage after puberty.

A fourth component is one of the hardest to teach — a more durable and realistic notion of attractiveness. An attractive person is one you like more as you get to know them more, not one who is physically attractive on first impression.

Fifth, people are taught where their unrealistic notions came from. Methods of conditioning are discussed, so they can be combated. The effects of advertising in particular are discussed, so that realistic goals can be planned.

Sixth, self-control procedures are taught — how to control anger or depression, how to reinterpret expressions and messages from other people, how to conduct reality testing to see if one really does have fat thighs.

A big step in the body image game is to desensitize yourself to new situations. If you are afraid to wear shorts because of those big thighs, first you might just wear them around the house, then



Psychology in the '90s

with DR. ARNOLD RINCOVER

to go pick up the mail, then to get milk at the grocery store down the street, and so on.

Join a discussion group, a group of people to talk to who are going through the same thing. In this way, you can talk about what happened when you went out in shorts, and people can support you.

There is something comforting about knowing that other people are going through the same things. It took a lot of years to come to hate your body image, so it takes some time and some support to overcome it.

Finally, people are encouraged to care for their bodies, not obsess over them. Stop the secret eating. Keep healthy fruits and vegetables handy, so they are easy to eat. Don't eat as a reaction to stress or to celebrate.

Stop comparing your hips and your thighs to those of others.

But all of these healthy actions are presented not as a way to change your body, rather as a way for you to feel good about yourself, in control, moving in a positive direction.

Those good feelings are not dependent upon how many pounds or inches you lose, but are found in the doing, in the act itself — eating fruit when you know you could have grabbed some chips. A good example is exercise. The goal here is to find an exercise that gives you a high, a rush of some kind.

The goal of these programs is to help people accept themselves and become happier in the process.

Dr. Cash and others have conducted a number of clinical trials on the effectiveness of body image programs, with very positive results. People who do the program have substantially reduced their social anxiety and improved their self esteem. They have discovered that they can be happy without a perfect hourglass figure or a v-shaped chest.



Thanks, for the simple things

The in-laws plus one. Every Thanksgiving, hubby's relatives converge on our cottage for a fall feast. This year, for the first time, my sister came from Montreal to lend me familial support.

It's different in autumn at the cottage. There is a peacefulness after the hubbub of motorboats in the summer. The lake even seems calmer. The clear, glassy water reflects the colours of the leaves. From a verdant panorama, we move into a technicolour vista and then to muted browns.

At last, the mosquitoes, horseflies and deerflies have departed. We can trudge through the forest without having to turn into human windmills to fight off the flying creatures. The dying leaves crunch and rustle beneath our feet. And we go for a long walk, camera in hand, ready to capture the full-colour tableau to sustain us through the black and white winter.

My sister, daughter and I — we three women — explore our favourite haunt at the huge split rock, sit high up on the hill overlooking the lake, and gaze out upon the sun-sparkled water below a cloudless, blue sky.

And while we delight in nature, who is cooking dinner? Why, hubby, of course. Never one to acquire a skill that would be of use in a hard labour in the kitchen, I have remained constantly dumb regarding the art of baking succulent turkeys and creating tangy dressings and yummy gravies.

"You're so good at this," I continually remind hubby.

We don't leave him high and dry, however. We help where we can — peeling potatoes, cutting up turnips, collecting parsley from the garden, and rounding up dishes and cutlery for our expected crowd of 35 people, plus one baby who has yet to experience fowl food.

Our guests arrive, laden with appetizers, salads, and the requisite pumpkin pies annually



On the Homefront

with ESTHER CALDWELL

baked by my mother-in-law.

For the first Thanksgiving that I can recall, we are able to enjoy a warm, sunny day. No wood burning in the stove. Guests step indoors just long enough to grab an appetizer before joining others who are basking in the autumn sunshine out on the deck.

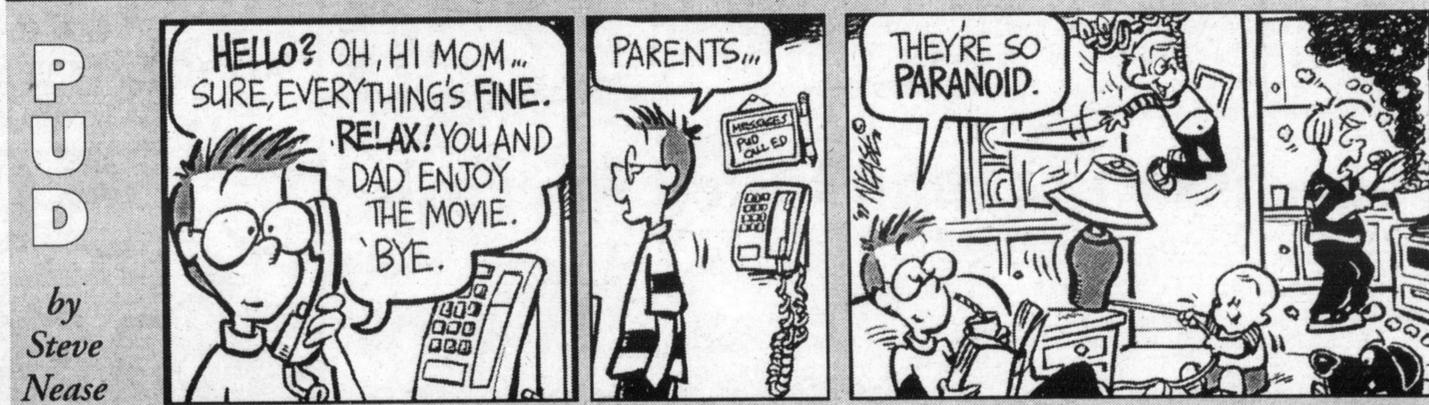
Meanwhile, the children run around in the backyard collecting big handfuls of leaves until they have built a large mound. The kids line up for the swing. Up and up they soar, suddenly releasing themselves, flying through the air, and landing in the soft bed of leaves. It looks fun enough to try it.

It's time for the banquet. Out by the beach, these same children gather in a circle and sing a song of thanksgiving as we adults look down upon them from the deck.

We line up, filing through the kitchen, loading up our plates, and heading for the diningroom table or a chair in the living room: The teens congregate together, while the little kids gobble up their main course, grab some dessert, and hurry back to their pile of leaves.

Small groups, both outdoors and indoors, regroup for conversation and recollections.

And I silently thank my guests for fashioning another memorable gathering.



P
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by
Steve
Nease