

ENGLISH 50 FINAL EXAM, SPRING 2007

“The Real Skinny” by Belinda Luscombe *Time*, October 2, 2006

Finger-pointing is not a recognized weight-loss exercise. But you wouldn't know it from the vigor with which they do it in the fashion industry. Particularly when the subject of skinny models comes up. And recently it has come up a lot, what with one malnourished South American model dying when she stepped off the runway, the Madrid fashion shows barring models who are too thin, and the scary walking chopsticks who came down the runway in New York City this month.

The Madrid move, which was to bar from the runway any model who fell below a certain weight, may have been simply a genius marketing exercise. (Hands up, any-one who knew Madrid even had a fashion week.) But it had a ripple effect. Edinburgh, the biggest fashion center in all of ... Scotland, announced it would do the same for its fashion shows. The mayor of Milan, where the shows are this week, said she wouldn't be opposed to having that restriction in her city. No one took her up on it. Ripple effects don't have much of a shot against the surging currents of fashion.

Pretty much everyone--everyone not directly involved in the business of clothing, that is--agrees that something has to be done about the waning weight of models. Twenty years ago, the average model was a size 8; today she's a size 0. It's easy to explain why models are so skinny--because of their strict dietary regimen of nicotine, arugula and rock-star boyfriends. But nobody can explain why they have to be that way.

Modeling agencies, the motherly folks who inform the models that they can eat or work but not both, say it's because photographers demand subjects with skin, bones and preferably nothing else. The photographers say it's the designers who set the limits. Giorgio Armani, one such designer, last week blamed the stylists, the people who put together the looks for the photo shoots at the magazines. The magazines say it's Hollywood or it's advertisers or it's both. And the advertisers say people find their products more desirable when on, next to, or usually just barely covering slender body types.

And what do we the people say? Do we rise up and say, "I categorically refuse to buy any article of clothing unless the person promoting it weighs more than she did when she wore knee socks?" Or at least, "Where do I send the check for the chicken nuggets?" Actually, not so much. Mostly, our responses range from "I wonder if that would look good on me?" to "I don't know who that skinny-ass cow is, but I hate her already."

Clearly, the cycle has to be broken somewhere, and the good folks of Madrid should be applauded for trying. Alas, they picked on the scrawniest link in the whole fashion chain, the model. It's like trying to wipe out Lyme disease by killing Bambi.

These are not supermodels we're talking about here. (Hello? They're working in Madrid.) They're very young girls, often teenagers, often from East European countries (the "emerging economy" look is big right now), who are in a strange land, away from home and surrounded by people who want to make money off them. So what they really don't need is someone assigning them the blame for being too thin.

The reason we want models to gain weight, let's face it, is not mostly to protect them. It's to protect other, less genetically freakish girls--our daughters or, ahem, us--from having poor self-esteem or

becoming anorexic. But people don't get anorexia from looking at fashion magazines (although it doesn't help). Anorexia is as much about a girl feeling that her life is not in her control as it is about body image. So dictating to models what their body type should be, whether to make it bigger or smaller, seems to send the wrong message.

A more useful place to start assigning blame might be the designers. (You thought I was going to blame the magazines?) Designers, let's face it, design for the thin. The skinny pants, low-cut jeans, micro-minis and bubble skirts that are coming our way this fall all look fabulous if you're built like a darning needle, but they're just not going to work on us pincushions. Is there really no middle ground between micro-shorts and muumuus? We can build a camera that makes you look slimmer in photographs, but we can't design a flattering outfit for a 145-lb. woman?

Of course, the dirty little secret here is that not all models have to be thin. It's one of the cruelest axioms of fashion that once you get big, you can get big. If Tyra Banks shows up for a shoot with a little extra poundage, they just touch her up later. Kate Moss could, if she wished, balloon all the way up to 100 lbs., and she'd still get work. But little NadyaAbouttofalluva eats one pork rind, and she's on the first plane back to Uzbekistan. It's hard to feel sympathy for people who make their living from being freakily beautiful, but come on, folks, leave the models alone. Let's at least pick on someone our own size.

English 50 Final Exam

General Instructions

For this exam, use ink, write legibly on every other line of your paper, and use only one side of each page. You may use a dictionary, an electronic speller, and a thesaurus.

Print your instructor's name in the upper right corner of this page. Print your own name on the back of the last page of your essay. Turn in your copy of "The Real Skinny" along with your written exam and this sheet. Failure to follow directions will disqualify your exam.

Essay Format

Your assignment is to write a 500-700 word essay addressing the prompt given below. This essay must include an introductory paragraph, several central paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph. The first paragraph must identify the author of the article and provide a clear and identifiable thesis statement. Each central paragraph must be based on a topic sentence that supports your thesis and that is developed from a variety of methods, such as explanation and elaboration, facts, quotations, examples, and references to authority. The concluding paragraph must bring the essay to a satisfactory close.

Prompt

"The Real Skinny"

In "The Real Skinny," Belinda Luscombe addresses the problems associated with the dangerous thinness of today's female models – low self-esteem, eating disorders, and an unhealthy emphasis on appearance, to name a few. Indeed, sociologists and psychologists have long argued that images of males and females in advertising (and the media in general) create problems for all individuals. What do you think is the impact of media images on personal lives? Do you agree that the images of the "ideal female" (emphasizing appearance, especially thinness) and/or "ideal male" (emphasizing status, wealth, and power) are harmful? Or do you think that the media provides positive role models for males and females? You might also argue that the media has little influence and that such factors as family, friends, and personal attitudes are more important in our decisions.

Final Note

Remember that your general goal is to demonstrate to the reader of your essay that you have understood what you have read and that you have reacted sensitively and intelligently to it. Your specific goal is to write a well-constructed essay of the sort you have been studying and practicing all semester.