

# High Fashion Is Only Meant for Boyish Bodies, Not For the Venus of Willendorf

*Where does this "thin" reality leave the rest of  
us, the average-sized women?*



Venus of Willendorf, dated around 25,000 to 30,000 years ago and found at a Paleolithic site in Austria

by Phyllis Chesler

What do high fashion couturiers think is the ideal female

figure? That's obvious. They prefer a very tall, very thin woman, whose breasts are almost flat and whose hips are as narrow and angled as that of a beautiful adolescent boy. I spelled it all out in 1976, in a book titled [Women, Money, and Power](#) which I published together with Judge Emily Jane Goodman. We divided the chapters up, and I titled one of mine: "I'd Rather Be Dead Than Ugly: The Psycho-economics of Female Beauty."

Short, round, large breasted pregnant women are not viewed as fashionable. I meditated on this in my 1978 book titled [About Men](#). In a chapter about male womb-envy, I noted that women are hanging everywhere in museums in oil paintings, but "how few of them are pregnant." Since most women have been pregnant all the time during their child-bearing years, one wonders why our great painters pre-dated high fashion models? (Well, Rubens painted rosy-hued and fleshy women, but none of them were pregnant).

High fashion models who are not a size 0-2 are [not welcome](#) on the runways. A "strikingly beautiful" 5'8" model, Jill Korleve, half Dutch, half Surinamese, who wears a size 8-10 is considered a "plus size" model. For years, she tortured her flesh and her soul:

"I was dieting constantly 24/7, trying so hard to conform to the industry standard...I was antisocial, miserable, and never 'thin' enough to get booked, so I felt I was starving myself for nothing."

Take a good look at most movie stars. Big eyes, big, swollen lips, big enhanced breasts, but shrunken, almost mini-women, from the waist down. Child-like. I see women who look like this all over the Upper East Side. Tom Wolfe called them "social X-rays." I will not denigrate or further reduce them in any way. I only wish that they loved themselves for reasons other than how they look—and perhaps, would like them to enjoy a full meal of whatever they most enjoy, even if it's

fattening, yes, every single day.

Where does this “thin” reality leave the rest of us, the average-sized women? Ethnic women? Women of color? Women whose ancestry is not Northern European? Women who do not have a single “thin” gene in their bodies? Poor women, whose lives are stressed and who tend to eat cheap, comfort foods, all dangerously high in addictive sugars?

These are the denizens of a certain kind of Hell, condemned to perpetual dieting, weight loss medication (if they can afford it), cycles of weight loss and weight gain, self-blame, self-hate, and self-deprivation coupled with permanent shame and frustration while shopping in stores that do not carry clothing larger than a size 12. Larger sizes are in their own, much smaller specialty areas and have fewer selections to offer.

Where can average and average-size women “see” themselves as simply acceptable?

I know: Fat-shaming is out. Large size and fabulous singers and writers are in (Lizzo and her backup crew, Roxanne Gay, Aretha, always).

I know: Men are judged as well—but mainly by what’s in their wallets, not so much on whether they can maintain teenage-era good looks and good bodies into their senior years. Even if they are so judged, the average Joe does not care as much about this as does our average Jane.

Once, I had a 20” waist. Once, I wore bikinis. Once, I cut a fashionable, even a glamorous figure about town, at least for an intellectual. Yes. Other women told me so. This is all that counts.

And then—time passed as it always does. Dangerous illnesses came and lingered forevermore in my immune system. Multiple surgeries led to a more sedentary life style—et Voila! I am

now in my 80s, and I'm a large-size woman, a plus-size woman. Most stores do not carry my sizes. The one genuine plus-size store in Manhattan that catered to women of a certain age and size and who had glamorous, sparkly, kinda outfits closed long ago.

Once I became walking-disabled—ah, it became too hard to shop. What to do, what to do. Here's what.

Over the years, I've had simple, silk dusters made for me by tailors in India. A representative would come to my home in New York and measure almost every inch of me.

Lately, sometimes, I have my clothing made by a very talented Russian emigre who works in the tiniest shop imaginable, and like the fairy that she is, spins costumes for her clientele made of burned velvet, silk, chiffon, all really meant for the stage. This luxury is a necessity for me, but it really costs no more than ready-to-wear clothing costs in most Fifth Avenue stores.

There she is, up above. Does anyone even remember our Paleolithic ancestress, aka the Venus of Willendorf? Our droop-breasted, pregnant, or postpartum fertility or Venus-Goddess figure? Where is she now that she's so desperately needed? Who will fashion clothes for this venerable woman?

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