

Presentation of susan bordo "reading the slender body" essay sample

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Issues of dieting, fat, and slenderness are hot topics in our culture. Bordo addresses them from a postmodern, but historical, feminist perspective. In this essay, she attempts to explain the appeal of slenderness in our society; and also, how the ideology of normal our society holds can be mentally and physically damaging for many people.

So, what does it mean to be slender? The ideas behind slenderness have changed considerably throughout human existence. The Greeks believed that the regulation of food consumption would lead to self mastery and achieve moderation. Christians during the middle ages thought of fasting as a way to cleanse to spiritual body. Then around the end of the 19th century, people began to view the physical body as the enemy rather than the soul.

Hoping to defeat the body, our culture has created a booming market of diets, cosmological surgery, and exercising equipment. The body management market feeds off the trends found in movies and music videos, on fashion runways, and in advertisements. With every new trend, comes a new body style. Remember the nineties when Kate Moss was on the runways. Her body had the shape of a 13 year old boy. No curves, no shape. Yet, she was in every magazine wearing Calvin Klein’s clothes. What about now. Pink and her fit body with cuts in her muscles at her hips as we have been seeing men, like D’Angelo and Usher, sculpting. It may seem as though there is nothing wrong with wanting to achieve this idealized view of health found in our culture, but what happens when the pursuit goes wrong?

Bordo begins by showing how flab became the enemy. As our culture changes, so does the idea of the perfect body. Thin is not the goal anymore. An athletic build, free of all bulges and lumps, is the desired body style of this day and age. During the 80's, people who suffered from excessive weight were the target of advertisers. Now, people of what our culture would consider normal proportions are "attacking" these bulges through liposuction and compulsive dieting and exercising. Bordo explains the desire for a "more contained body profile" as a way for controlling "uncontained desire, unrestrained hunger, [and] uncontrolled impulse." Bordo expresses our culture's view of the slender body as, "To be slim is not enough—the flesh must not 'wiggle.'" In saying this, she explains why the ideal body image is slowly becoming thinner and thinner as our culture progresses into the 21st century.

Next she talks about how the view of one's body affects the inner self. Until the late 19th century, the body represented one's social and economic status. The more plump, the more wealth and power. Then, the slender body began to symbolize power without the outward showing of wealth through the size of the belly. As material wealth began to take a back seat to the ability to control and manage, excess body weight began to symbolize a deficiency in will and morals.

Muscularity became the embodiment of masculine characteristics. Muscles expressed the controlled sexuality that both males and females would like to achieve. Fat, on the other hand, denotes laziness and lack of discipline. If one's body represents the emotional and psychological state inside the body,

the battle is within the mind making every bulge and undeveloped muscle representing a character flaw. Viewing oneself in this way is unhealthy. The body and the mind are connected, but are not necessarily representative of each other. Having a pot belly or giggly thighs does not mean you are mentally weak or lazy. It simply means that you have not taken the time to conform your body to the ways of our culture or you may possibly suffer from some physical ailments.

Next Bordo talks about our cultures encouragement of ideal slenderness. Living in a capitalist society, we are encouraged as consumers to fulfill our every desire but not to overindulge. Our bodies often pay the price of the struggle between instant gratification and self restraint. Obesity, anorexia, and bulimia are caused by our cultures view of the body and the importance of its shape. Bordo states, " Bulimia embodies the unstable double bind of consumer capitalism, while anorexia and obesity embody and attempted resolution of that double bind."

In longing to reach the norm many people fall victim to these detrimental illnesses. Sadly, women are more subject to these eating disorders than men, the number of men suffering from eating disorders is on the rise. Our culture puts pressure on each of its inhabitants to attain this ideal body type that is unrealistic for most people. The images that pollute television and magazines make us all feel inadequate if we don't meet the credentials of slenderness; therefore, continuing the role of our society in the development of eating disorders.

So how does one manage the physical self? Bordo says that to achieve the ideal body of our culture one must keep “ constant watchfulness over appetite and strenuous work on the body itself is required to conform to this ideal.” This would be the most rewarding way to attain the admirable body of our culture, but many people refuse to put the work required to have a healthy body. Many rely on diets and other methods that produce instant gratification. Bordo looks at dieting as a direct path to failure when hoping to this idea of a normal body in our culture. She explains how deprivation leads to bingeing and the process of dieting develops feeling of defeat and worthlessness.

To ride themselves of these emotions based around appetite and food intake, many people develop eating disorders. Bordo explains how bulimia, anorexia, and obesity each deal with the appetite. Bulimic people struggle with their appetite through bingeing and perging, in hopes of maintaining a fairly normalized weight. While, obese people feel they cannot control their appetite and let the defeat reside in their bodies. Anorectics, on the other hand, strive to excel at his or her slenderness by depriving the body of food to show complete control over the appetite. But what about all those people who lie somewhere amongst all of this? How do they manage their bodies? Are they making any effort to help those who have lost the battle with their appetites achieve happiness? Of course not, they are the one’s saying, “ God, she’s fat.” and, “ She’s too skinny.” or making the advertisements that promote the unrealistic body style that most cannot achieve.

Finally, I will discuss why it is that women have more pressure from our culture to not just be slender, but physically thin. It should first be said that the majority of men would prefer a slender woman as a partner. Living up to the Playboy bunny image most men have in their heads, puts strain on women to be that beautiful girl with the tiny waist, the ample breast, and the firm, round butt. Women are more likely to diet, exercise, and have surgery. And WHY? So we can be some man with a beer belly's ideal wife?!

Bordo speaks of women adopting a slim build as a way to compete in a phallogocentric society. She says that women are the essence of sexuality, emotions, and hunger. Considering this Bordo concluded, "Women's desires are by their very nature excessive, irrational, threatening to erupt and challenge the patriarchal order." Men are in some sense intimidated by women's desires, causing women to feel as though they should restrain their desires. As our culture moved away from the body type of Marilyn Monroe to the present day of build Christina and Brittany, women have found a reassurance in adopting a more boyish build to compete in a man's world. Bordo stated, "the lean body of the career businesswoman today may symbolize...neutralization." She also discusses how the boyish build may also "symbolize freedom from the reproductive destiny" of women who find femininity to be "constraining and suffocating." But does changing your body type really free women of what they consider to be the burden of being a woman?

Our culture is constantly changing. The ideas and images that exist within it carve our lives for us. We accept the norm as what we see on television;

then, we adapt. Bordo says, “ Nobody can escape either the imprint of culture or its gendered meanings.” This may be true; but, we can educate ourselves in hopes of finding a truth that will enable us to embrace both our mind and body to achieve a personal harmony that culture cannot corrupt.