



# Am I Thin Enough Yet?: The Cult of Thinness and the Commercialization of Identity

*Sharlene Hesse-Biber*

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Whether they are rich or poor, tall or short, liberal or conservative, most young American women have one thing in common--they want to be thin. And they are willing to go to extraordinary lengths to get that way, even to the point of starving themselves. Why are America's women so preoccupied with weight? What has caused record numbers of young women--even before they reach their teenage years--to suffer from anorexia and bulimia? In *Am I Thin Enough Yet?*, Sharlene Hesse-Biber answers these questions and more, as she goes beyond traditional psychological explanations of eating disorders to level a powerful indictment against the social, political, and economic pressures women face in a weight-obsessed society.

Packed with first-hand, intimate portraits of young women from a wide variety of backgrounds, and drawing on historical accounts and current material culled from both popular and scholarly sources, *Am I Thin Enough Yet?* offers a provocative new way of understanding why women feel the way they do about their minds and bodies. Specifically, Hesse-Biber highlights the various ways in which American families, schools, popular culture, and the health and fitness industry all undermine young women's self-confidence as they inculcate the notions that thinness is beauty and that a woman's body is more important than her mind. The author builds her case in part by letting her subjects tell their own story, revealing in their own words how current standards of femininity lead many women to engage in eating habits that are not only self-destructive, but often akin to the obsessions and ritualistic behaviors found among members of cults. For instance, we meet Delia, a bulimic college senior who makes the startling admission that "my final affirmation of myself is how many guys look at me when I go into a bar." We even learn of six-year-olds like Lauren, already preoccupied with her weight, who considers herself "a real clod" in ballet class because she is not as thin as her peers. We are introduced to women (and men) from different cultures who themselves have acquired eating disorders in pursuit of the American standard of physical perfection. And we learn of the often tragic consequences of this obsession with thinness, as in the case of Janet, who underwent surgery to reduce her weight only to suffer from chronic illness and pain as a result. The book concludes with Hesse-Biber's prescriptions on how women can overcome their low self-image through therapy, spiritualism, and grass-root efforts to empower themselves against a society obsessed with beauty and thinness.

*Am I Thin Enough Yet?* brings into sharp focus the multitude of societal and psychological forces that compel American women to pursue the ideal of thinness at any cost. It will remain a benchmark work on the subject for many years to come.

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