



OBEISITY

From ancient Egyptian times onwards the appearance of being well nourished, extending to what we would call overweight, has been a sign of power and wealth. Through gargantuan feats at the table such kings as Louis VI of France and Henry VIII of England turned themselves into mountains of flesh. By contrast thinness tended to connote poverty or neurasthenia. In the nineteenth century, as food supplies became more regular and plentiful, poor people could become fat, and in consequence the rich began to prize thinness. Standards of ideal weight are therefore culturally conditioned.

In our society women are bombarded with advertising and exhortations to maintain their attractiveness by keeping thin, and fashions are designed to suit those who succeed. Predictably, some overdo it and become anorexic. While men too are enjoined to keep trim, many fail to achieve the ideal. Gay men are more successful in this struggle than straight men, and the styles they favor tend to show off slender bodies. Yet even within the overall "thinist" aesthetic there are variations. In the 1960s and early '70s an almost emaciated look prevailed, promoted by the **counterculture** and no doubt conditioned by appetite-suppressing drugs. With the increasing popularity of **gymnasia**, however, gay men began to admire a more hefty look, though one characterized by muscle rather than fat.

At the turn of the century some researchers believed that homosexual men, being in their view a third sex, tended to have broad hips. This assumption has not been statistically confirmed. More generally the German psychiatrist Ernst Kret-

schmer (1888–1964) believed that a person's temperamental reaction patterns reflected physiological type, with heavy-set persons behaving in one way and slender ones another. These theories too have not found general acceptance.

On average gay men tend to be more prejudiced against obesity in their sexual partners than women, whether straight or lesbian. The sexual advertisements of gay papers teem with the admonition: "no fats." Still, there are a few individuals, known as chubby chasers, who admire what most reject, typically preferring partners who are over 300 pounds. People of these two complementary persuasions, the chubbies and their chasers, join Girth and Mirth clubs. In Japan travelers find that "well padded" older men are in considerably greater demand among homosexuals than in Western countries, a difference that tends to confirm the culturally determined character of the preference.

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OBJECTIFICATION, SEXUAL

This expression, which became popular only in the 1970s, denotes an attitude of treating others as mere vehicles for sensual or ego gratification—or simply as sexual partners—rather than as full human beings deserving of equality of respect. An individual who is so treated is a *sex object*. These terms were spread by adherents of the women's movement, who sometimes refer the phenomenon to a mental pattern which they term *objectivism*, the unwarranted assumption that male (or patriarchal) values are simply