

Recitation C

The Thin Line between Beauty and Health

Fashion models look nothing like ordinary people, but their images are everywhere. They are on magazines, TV, advertising posters and in newspapers selling anything from cell phones to cosmetics. However, they are also selling something else: the idea that “to be thin is to be beautiful.”

In the United States, fashion models now weigh 23 percent less than the average woman. Twenty years ago, this figure was just eight percent. In Asia, too, there is a trend toward thin models. Korean beauty contest winners since 1975 are taller and thinner than the winners the year before. However, until the 1970s in Korea, plump women were seen as healthy and attractive.

The idea that thin is beautiful used to be mainly one held in wealthy, Western societies. In the last 50 years, the international media has spread this idea around the world. These images are having a big impact on how women see themselves. A recent survey of women from ten different countries, including Brazil, Argentina, Japan, and the United States, found that a third of the women were not happy with their weight. Even women of a healthy weight are on diets to become thinner.

Doctors worry that they are harming their health. People who diet a lot are more likely to have poor health and be depressed. The “look” that they are aiming for is unhealthy. Photos in magazines are often altered to make the models look even thinner than they are. No one in real life – not even the models – can look like the magazine images.

Not all cultures think this is beautiful. In many African countries, people traditionally see plump women as beautiful. In some parts of Nigeria, women go to special houses before they get married. There, they eat more to put on weight for their wedding day. But how long will it be before even in these areas, women start wanting to be thin?

(319 words)