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## COMMENTARY

## Hanks: Celebrate the beauty of just being yourself

**Anna Hanks, REGULAR CONTRIBUTOR**

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Like numerous other women across the globe, I spent July preparing for the "Miss Universe" pageant. As the contestants were practicing keeping a straight face while wearing one of those overspangled, Vegas-inspired "national costumes," I was sharpening my claws and honing my witticisms.

While watching the July 23 broadcast, I couldn't help but notice how the protruding collarbones, hipbones and rib cages of the contestants made them look like the starving peasants who brought us the French Revolution.

Miss Ukraine's giant hair and stick-insect body made her look like a bobblehead doll. It was tragically ironic that the second runner-up, Miss Switzerland, while representing a country known for cheese and chocolate, had a rib cage protruding like a starving greyhound. It was like shooting skinny fish in a barrel.

I woke up last Monday morning to learn that, less than an hour after being crowned Miss Universe, Miss Puerto Rico Zuleyka Rivera Mendoza, 18, had collapsed on stage during a news conference. Reportedly, she was suffering from that old celebrity standby, "exhaustion." The fact that she looked like an emaciated Angelina Jolie — her jutting hipbones clearly visible in her metal-chain evening dress — supposedly played no part in her collapse. The PR folks insisted Rivera had eaten plenty that day. They claimed she collapsed from the strain of holding up her heavy dress under the hot lights.

Please.

Why couldn't they tell me something plausible? Tell me Rivera collapsed because of a vicious sinking spell cast by the queen of the fairies. Tell me the fairy queen demanded the return of her pearl and diamond tiara. Give me something believable. Healthy young women don't just go around fainting from the weight of their clothing!

The biggest problem with these emaciated women being applauded as beautiful is the way it sometimes affects other women. Some average women feel unattractive just because they are more than skin, bones and makeup.

In contrast to the "Miss Universe" pageant, earlier this month, the Oxygen network aired "Mo'Nique's F.A.T. Chance." It's a reality show/beauty pageant that aims to find America's most "Fabulous And Thick" woman. In contrast to the itty-bittying — of "Miss Universe," the "Miss Fabulous And Thick" contestants avoided that hungry and peevisish look.

I've adored Mo'Nique since watching her "Moesha" spinoff, "The Parkers." On that comedy, she played larger-than-life Nikki Parker, a single mom attending college with her daughter.

I think that much of Mo'Nique's appeal comes from her being a confident and luscious size 22, rather than someone apologetic for her lack of twig-ness.

I found "Mo'Nique's F.A.T. Chance" to be extremely upsetting. It turned out to be a self-help show that tried to make several large women feel better about themselves. Though the show's contestants claimed to be proudly "Fabulous And Thick," many seemed timid and apologetic.

During a horseback riding segment, one "Miss F.A.T." contestant worried about breaking the horse. Another contestant worried about breaking the dude "dipping" her backward during a dancing lesson. I found that troubling, as Mo'Nique herself isn't apologetic about being "Fabulous And Thick."

Perhaps I felt sorry for the apologetic ones because I have a perfect figure — circa 1906. According to the "Edwardian Silhouette" entry on the Web site [fashion-era.com](http://fashion-era.com), "The fashionable hourglass silhouette belonged to the mature woman of ample curves and full bosom." Take that, my scrawny sister.

Yet, fashions change. That's the key word: fashion. Being out of fashion shouldn't be a cause for the self-loathing demonstrated on "Mo'Nique's F.A.T. Chance."

That self-loathing didn't just fall out of the sky. Women across the country obsess about alleged figure flaws. Telling someone she has lost weight is seen as a compliment. The ideal of thin is so ingrained that few people question it.

And then there is the problem of fashion. Fashion stories, including those in this paper, seldom feature anything, or anyone, larger than a size 16. I don't blame them. Larger

clothing often runs a dowdy season — or six — behind current fashion. Finding anything divalicious over a size 16 is practically a miracle. Alas, it's usually not a "cashmere-acle" as fictional Carrie Bradshaw quipped on "Sex and the City." Larger-size clothing tends to be found primarily at lower price points, and in non-natural fibers. Because the average American woman is perhaps a size 14, this is oh-so-wrong.

For larger women, including contestants on "Mo'Nique's F.A.T. Chance," the problem isn't, as Sir Mix-A-Lot rapped in his 1992 Grammy-winning ode to the prodigiously padded posterior, "Baby Got Back." The problem is that "Baby Got Flak." We live in a world where larger women are repeatedly told that they are less, just because they are more.

Of course, there is a limit to how much "more" you can be. Just like a stable skyscraper, good health is based on a strong infrastructure. If your cardiologist tells you that you need more exercise, then get moving.

All women should embrace their inner diva. Don't bother trying to fit into someone else's idea of glamour. You can only be glamorous by being yourself.

After "Mo'Nique's F.A.T. Chance," in which forensic morgue technician Tanisha Malone, 27, was crowned "Miss F.A.T. 2006," the show's contestants and Mo'Nique celebrated with cake.

Perhaps that's what they should do at "Miss Universe" next year.

Yes, let them eat cake.

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