

You've come a long way, baby?

BY KHRISTA BOYLAN

International Women's Day is March 8. For many women, it is a day to feel "liberated", to free ourselves from the impositions of society, to truly feel good about who and what we are. I would like to take this opportunity to nudge my sisters to consider something that, I feel, will enable us to be liberated for every second of our lives.

In January, an excellent article appeared in the Gazette: "Eating disorders still common among women" by Simona Rabinovitch. It was highly disturbing, but only because it was about a very serious problem. Contrary to its title, it had much less to do with eating disorders and more about how we, as women, have learned to hate ourselves.

Since we stood on two feet, and even before then, we have been taught that being pretty is important for being respected as a woman. Women's magazines of the 70s showed pretty women with perfect hair folding their laundry and baking cakes. In 1997, we see ourselves carrying briefcases and giving presentations, however, never is a hair out of place, never are we without

makeup and not one of us weighs in at more than 15 percent below our ideal weight. Yep, we've really come a long way baby!

What's even sadder about this whole fiasco is that it is our sisters who are the editors of these magazines, who choose these silly images to teach teenage girls what the woman of today should be, or more simply stated: what she should look like. There was a day when women could blame their frustrations or their oppression on men. I suggest that in 1997, we are doing a fine job of this on our own.

Why do we do this to ourselves? Why can't we celebrate the diversity of womanness? Like it or not, our bodies are designed to bear children. The average woman is not six feet tall and 115 pounds. Rabinovitch states that society considers this as the "ideal" woman. What this implies is that 99% of us are less than ideal. Heck, with "standards" like this we can never be ideal. We will never measure up, in the minds of others, but most importantly, in our own minds.

But we can try. We will opt out of reading Cosmo for a while and buy Shape instead, searching foods to eat that will not make our

thighs larger so — you guessed it — we can feel better about ourselves. "The smaller the jeans the greater the soul," notes Rabinovitch. If I hear another friend knock herself down about how infrequently she has been going to the gym lately, I think I will scream.

I do not deny that the way women and men feel about their body is a big part of how they feel about themselves. Years of consulting psychology, biology and history texts affirms this. Sure, we all need a healthy body image, but what we need even more is to try to stop internalizing this constructed "ideal" body that doesn't exist. What most of us don't even realize is that people in magazines, on TV, and in movies aren't real people but computer-generated images. Now that's reality! It's an image. Spooky.

So what do we do? Each of us has heard it, time and again. There are literally hundreds of books at Entitlement that include these two words in their title: accept yourself. Unfortunately, I think I've already done that, but I'm still rather frustrated about this whole thing. After much thinking, I have come to realize why someone or something tell-

ing me to accept myself is disheartening — because it implies that there is something about myself which I need to accept. By "accepting" my body, I continue to ensure that I must accept it, because it is less than perfect.

Some may say that accepting myself, or my body, makes me a better person. Unfortunately, it may do just the opposite. With society still caught up on the ex-

istence of an ideal body, the woman who says, "I accept this (my weight, my clothes, my skin)," may evoke a sense of martyrdom from others, or even worse, from herself.

Again, I ask you: what is there about myself that I need to accept? I am this way. My body is this way. There is no need to change.

There really isn't.

Martin's not returning my calls

BY ALAN LEBLANC

Our esteemed finance minister Paul Martin brought down our federal budget two weeks ago with an election year slant to it. In it we were promised a \$350 million apprenticeship program, increased university funding, and a six hundred million dollar child tax benefit. Naturally, the welfare and poverty rights activists have been bemoaning the government, saying that this is not enough, and that an infrastructure needs to be built around it. In other words, they want their offices re-furnished.

But just what is poverty being defined as lately? StatsCan has redefined it to mean a family of three living on under \$25,300 a year. Can we really call it poverty if a child is getting the basic necessities of life and is still being loved and cared for? Studies show that these children tend to do as well in school as wealthier children and are just as socially adjusted. So are we defining poverty the right way?

Apparently the number of children living below the poverty line has jumped forty-five percent since 1989, but at that time the poverty rate was set at a family of three earning less than \$17 000 in 1997 dollars. It's not that poverty is up; it's our standards that went up.

Many of you probably think I'm poor-bashing in my usual self-effacing conservative way. Believe me, I know it's a difficult job market to break into, and the price of necessities, not luxuries, is what's hurting us. So now, without a poor-bashing intent in my frail body, is a few suggestions I have:

1. Many welfare recipients and low income earners are complaining about the high cost of rent. Naturally they are paying too much money for cramped, unsafe

quarters without anything to show for it. My suggestion is for a two-tiered mortgage system, with lower interest rates on the loan (say about 3.25% per annum) and instead of a down payment, work it into the total loan. The borrower will naturally have to prove he is a low income earner (paycheque stubs or EI/welfare claims). This way the banks can still make a profit by keeping their earnings above inflation, the borrowers will have equity once they pay off their mortgages, and the new housing starts can create new jobs. The banks could also readjust the financing plan if the borrower's financial situation improves, since that would save money for the borrower in the long run. Do the math if you don't believe me.

2. Did you know that only five per cent of all Canadians are in a single parent household, despite what the feminists tell you, yet sixty per cent are living below the poverty line? The statistics make me wonder if reinforcing the marriages in this country is worthwhile. A six month pre-marriage counselling session with your pastor/rabbi could be instituted as law. This would make people slow down and realize the seriousness of this lifelong commitment and reduce the divorce rate. Then we won't be having the husband run off and leave a mother to raise kids by herself. It's true, two can live as cheaply as one. Also, we must remove the common law status as marriage and start calling it what it really is — SHACKING UP. Hah! Who says you can't legislate ethics?

3. Make earning your high school diploma mandatory. This is a big complaint among low income earners, that they dropped out too early and don't have the right education. So what's a couple of years? Stay in school, it

couldn't hurt.

4. Start buying in bulk, folks, the BST is on its way! But seriously, what sense does it make to tax the basic necessities of life (groceries, home heating, cheap clothing) when that's about all the poor spend their money on? It's also nonsensical of the three provinces with about the highest percentages of poor people to slap taxes on them that will cost them hundreds of dollars more. To give you an example of how backwards this tax is, an article of clothing over one hundred dollars is tax exempt, while anything under is taxed. Is this the message we are sending our young people, that we will reward the gluttonous and decadent and tax the working (or lack thereof) poor? People may be in anger about the Liberals promising to scrap the GST, but it may be the BST that sway peoples' vote on election day. (Guess I'm not getting my pro-BST cheque for this article, huh?)

This takes us back to Paul Martin, who has given his ultimate incentive package to get people off welfare by giving them more money. What would have made more sense would be to give this money to those who work at low income jobs. This may help some welfare recipients come out of their economic shells and try their hands at running their own business. Things like restructuring the tax system and setting up better, not more, social programs is the key. Remember, children living in poverty, without the essentials of life, can grow up in some of the wealthiest homes when raised by stupid and lazy parents.

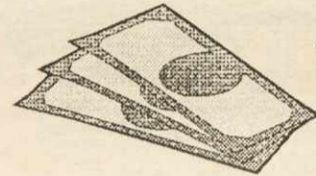
Of course, the best way of all to beat poverty is if this country were to catch all the people who don't pay their fair share of taxes. Yeah, I can call up Mr.

Cont'd on p.6: "Martin"

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