

PLATFORM

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## A return to common sense?

Last year it was only a rumour; today a reality. The Madrid Fashion Week has seriously changed the way in which models are selected. In the last week, 3 out of 10 models have been rejected for this week's Pasarela Cibeles, creating shock, outrage and anger among models, agencies, and designers.

And it's not hard to see why. Suddenly, a small fish like Cibeles has changed the rules of the game overnight. With the rise of the English super-model Twiggy in the 60s, famous at the age of just 16 with her stick-thin pubescent body, the 'obligation' to look ultra-thin began, and everyone in the business followed suit.

We all know it's easy to be thin. You either stop eating or take drugs to curb your appetite. Most women can attest to the fact that from the young age of 10 or 12, we started dieting to look like the girls and women in the fashion magazines.

But unfortunately it didn't end there. Normal, mature, healthy adult women continue the process they began, even though it's harder and harder to live up to these unattainable standards as they get older, and to wit diet, over-exercise, or engage in self-destructive activities such as drug use or succumb to eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia, which can result in osteoporosis, fertility problems, and even death.

The organisers of the Cibeles show have courageously accepted responsibility for the image of beauty that they portray. Whether we want to accept it or not, fashion is a mirror of what society believes to be the standard of beauty, with its predictable results.

At the same time, fashion is a huge



The decision by Madrid Fashion Week to ban over-thin models may bring an end to the sight of painfully thin models on the catwalks/A.PUIG

money-making industry where designers, agencies, models, and the media benefit by continuing these standards and have much to lose if things begin to change. But no one is to blame. Designers are taught to create their collections on waif-like mannequins where their garments simply 'fall' in the right places, later to be used on models who are extremely tall, flat-chested, have small or non-existent buttocks, hips, and stomachs...exactly the opposite of a normal, healthy woman. Modelling agencies

have simply found the "right fit" for their need and the thinnest models have consequently become the most well-paid in the industry. And the media has been right behind, on television and in print, selling these unhealthy, unrealistic and unattainable images, fuelling the problem and creating a society that accepts these standards and strives to be like the "skin and bone" models seen everywhere.

What Cibeles is doing is just a beginning, and it's long overdue. Unfortunately, other leading catwalks such as

New York or London haven't shown signs of following their lead. But I'm heartened to learn that Milan's mayor says that she may seek a similar ban for her city's show.

I'm still waiting for the day when designers create for women with average but beautiful bodies and where models look like the 'girl next door' because only then, will all women accept and love their bodies free from unreasonable and unnecessary complexes and hang-ups.

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### IN OTHER WORDS

## Could do better

Once again, another depressing and damning report on Spanish education standards, this time from the OECD, putting Spain third to last in line for educational achievement in the developed world. In particular the report highlighted the high drop-out rate, with a third of pupils failing to complete basic secondary education. The figures were especially bad for boys. The report noted, however, that Spain has come a long way since the transition to democracy in the 1970s, and from a very low base of Franco-era education. Even so, it is well behind former communist states such as the Czech Republic, still a poor nation compared to Spain.

The report, in which countries such as France and Italy also come out badly, highlights one of the mysteries of the developed world. How is that nations

that have been growing steadily more wealthy over the past 60 years, 60 years in which they have largely not been at war nor suffered major catastrophes, seem to have neither the will nor the money to provide their young with a decent education. Why, in a place as wealthy as Catalonia, do more than half of parents send their children to private or part-private schools? Why do the parents of five-year-olds in Britain find themselves obliged to attend church in fake displays of piety in order to get their children into a church school rather than shackle them with the perceived "bad start" offered by the state system? How is that the USA, the wealthiest nation in history, turns out millions of illiterates from its schools, while at the



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same time lowering educational standards and expectations lest any child feel "challenged" or "excluded"? For

what do we pay our taxes if not, at least, for a functioning education system?

Because education is a topic that arouses strong feelings among parents (especially middle-class ones – the sort of people who bother to vote), it has long been seen as a vote-winner among politicians. This has clearly been disastrous, for both pupil and teacher, as each change of government brings new curriculums, new tests, higher or lower standards, changes of emphasis, compulsory this and optional that, changes that have scarcely been implemented before being made redundant by the next incoming administration.

The Department of Education should have a budget and be accountable to those with the most invested in it: teachers, parents and students. The insanity of having, say, the Partido Popular impose one policy only for it to be overturned by the PSOE has to end. Even when no change of party has taken place, as under Margaret Thatcher's 13-year rule, or Tony Blair's nine years, policy is in a constant state of flux. In Britain, for example, an obsession with accountability has led teachers to complain that they spent more time filling in forms than they do teaching. Education should be the business of the state but should be kept out of the hands of politicians, freed from the opportunism of party policy drawn up by a people a majority of whom do not even send their children to state schools. Only then will standards start to improve.