



No idea

By Geraldine Mellet

I think these kind of publications should carry a caution similar to cigarette packets -
Warning - passive ingestion of the carcinogenic substances within will lead to
permanent erosion of your self esteem . . . Keep out of reach of minors.

I have never been good with temptation. So when I was forced to linger in the checkout queue with Belgian chocolate seashells within fingertip reach I did the only thing I could and grabbed the nearest magazine to block them out. Of course that's when the line moved on and I was a trolley length away from the magazine stand, so I took it home anticipating a quiet moment with a cup of tea, a comfy chair and a harmless read. I realised afterward I should have taken the seashells because if I was going to get heart-burn I would rather it had come from finely crafted chocolate than recycled gossip and mixed messages dressed up as false camaraderie, which repeated on me to the point that I needed to get it all out of my system.

It must have been a pretty slow news week because it was Fergie's tummy that dominated the front cover (and it's not that big). Fergie's Fat Crisis trumpeted the headline, with the informative subheading - 10KG GAIN IN 6 WEEKS. In case you still hadn't quite got it there was a much needed arrow actually directing your gaze from the photo of her steamrollered stomach circa March 2004 to the mildly inflated version in September. And if you needed it spelled out even further, it was, quite literally, with the headline FAT CRISIS in the largest font size available. A few pages later, past the full page chocolate ad, you were rewarded with the meat of the story.

In summary - Fergie got a grip on her finances and her sanity when she defeated the battle of the beltline and became a thin woman with a huge Weight Watchers contract. Now all this is apparently in jeopardy because she's been throwing back hot chips, pizzas and chicken wings (have they been going through her bin ?) adding 10kg in 6 weeks, right before filming more high profile weight loss ads. According to suspiciously unnamed 'friends', who no doubt met her in their astral travels, "she cut a lonely and bloated figure" when she attended a polo match recently (lonely - because of course who be seen dead with a bloated woman).

Following hot on the stilettos of these gold plated mates was a Beverley Hills plastic surgeon who put the boot in just that bit further when he delivered his expert opinion that her recent cosmetic surgery was folly and that it was her 'insecurity' that was letting her down. Gee, I wonder if that insecurity could have anything to do with your stomach having its own front page and your friends selling out on you. But lets leave full figured Fergie and her fathomless insecurity and flip a couple of pages to the tribute to our Olympic athletes and their beautiful bodies and medals born of years of sacrifice, followed by an article about Nicole Kidman being underweight and unhealthy, too driven to have a life or any pleasurable curves. Getting whiplash from the change in direction of the subtext ? Well hang on to your hats because the best is yet to come.

Right across the page from too skinny Nic is an ad for a weight loss program which includes a testimonial by a size 16 woman who finally saw the light, other than the one inside the fridge door, shedding most of her known self to morph into a model. Two pages later there is a double page feature on a formerly anorexic teenager and the book she's written about her passage to becoming a woman with a healthy and 'normally' shaped body. Continuing on with the message that allowing body image to dominate your thinking is simply ridiculous we are then invited to laugh at how even the most flawlessly beautiful stars of stage and screen are obsessed with their imperfect body bits - like Demi Moore and her saggy knees which she is apparently planning to subject to the plastic surgeon's tender scalpel.

But my favourite bit of guilt edged hypocrisy was the section straight under this called "The Insecure Self" in which a body image expert stated quite plainly "that with all the pressure people put celebrities under, its no wonder they suffer massive insecurities about their body shape". The operative word here is of course 'people'. Would that include the kind of people who run magazines targeting celebrities for instance ? "It doesn't matter if the whole world says you're beautiful" the body image guru continued "if you're insecure, you will still be insecure". Sounds about right, except of course if significant portions of the world are confronted with close ups of your 'bloated' and evidently unlovely abdomen, wouldn't that be something to feel understandably insecure about ? And in turn making every woman with a waistline less than wasp-like a trifle self conscious.

Talk about having it every which way, these women's magazines try to score points for their dripping sympathy for Fergie's ongoing struggles, unstated schadenfreude for the same thing and then a self righteous disapproval of her 'craziness' for being worried in the first place. How's that for setting up Fergie and every woman to fail when they look in the mirror.

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