

# THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF BEAUTY

Feb. 18, 2008

## IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT

- In all social situations, people form impressions of others
- People attempt to manage the impressions others make of them (topic of Friday & Monday)
- Today's reading: Some attributes that influence people's impression of us
  - The meaning of attributes varies from one culture to another
  - Social group memberships (age, sex, race, ethnicity)
  - Today's focus: physical appearance



KING-SIZE HOMER

## PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

- What traits characterize "good looking" vary by culture
- Ford and Beach's 1951 study of "primitive" societies found no universal standards
- Some hallmarks of women's beauty (number of societies):
  - Slim body build (6)
  - Medium body build (5)
  - Plump body build (13)
  - Narrow pelvis and slim hips (1)
  - Broad pelvis and wide hips (6)
  - Small ankles (3)
  - Shapely calves (5)
  - Upright, hemispherical breasts (2)
  - Long & pendulous breasts (2)
  - Large breasts (9)
- Western standards are becoming international standards through movies, television and other media

## CHANGING BEAUTY STANDARDS FOR WOMEN

- 16th Century: flat chest, 13-inch waist
- 17th Century: large bust and hips, white complexion
- 19th Century: tiny waist, full hips and bust
- 1920s: slender legs and hips, small bust
- 1940s & 1950s: hourglass shape
- 1960s: lean, youthful body, long hair
- 1970s: thin, tan, sensuous look
- 1980s: slim but also muscular, toned, fit body
- 1990s: thin bodies with large breasts
- 2000s: ???