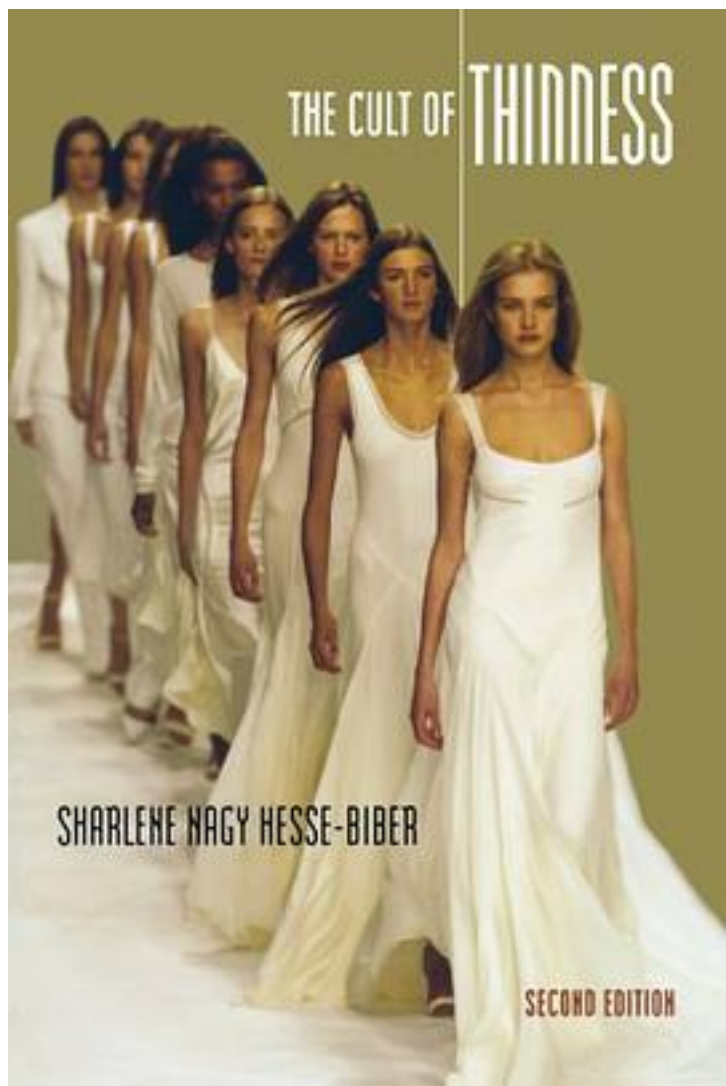


# The Cult of Thinness



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Whether they are rich or poor, liberal or conservative, religious or atheist, thriving or stagnant, most American women have one thing in common-they want to be thin-or thinner. And they are willing to go to extraordinary lengths to get that way, even to the point of starving themselves. Why are America's women so preoccupied with weight? Is there more to this preoccupation than weight alone? What has caused record numbers of young women-even before they reach their teenage years-to suffer from weight obsession, poor body image, and disordered eating? Why are some young women able to resist cultural pressures to be thin when others are not? Are there factors within American society that have fueled current outbreaks of anorexia and bulimia? The Cult of Thinness, Second Edition-a revised and expanded version of Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber's award-winning book, Am I Thin Enough Yet? (OUP, 1996)-answers these questions and more. Hesse-Biber goes beyond traditional psychological explanations of eating disorders to level a powerful indictment against the social, political, and economic pressures women face in a weight-obsessed society-a society that is, ironically, becoming increasingly more fat while worshipping a progressively more thin ideal. She examines the profit motives of corporate America that promote this paradox. Moreover, a new chapter on preteens, masculinity, ethnicity, gay and lesbian body image, and the globalization of body image issues align a refined cultural study of body image with the trends found in current research studies, demographic data, and popular culture. Using the metaphor of a cult, Hesse-Biber conveys the intense, day-to-day involvement that the pursuit of thinness demands. Examining the testimonies of young women concerning the practice of body rituals, she observes the extent to which these women sacrifice their bodies and minds to the pursuit of the ultra-slender ideal. She looks at pressures coming from their families and friends that perpetuate their cult-like practices and evaluates a range of therapies and personal and collective actions available to help women overcome their weight obsessions and eating problems. Hesse-Biber provides new frameworks for envisioning femininity and personal power, overcoming body insecurity, strengthening the inner self, and changing the cultural environment itself. Along the way, the reader is provided with important self-help tips to tackle the growing number of body image issues young women and new recruits to the "Cult of Thinness" continue to encounter. There are alternatives to the Cult of Thinness and this book provides a strong antidote.

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目录:

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