

From: West, Lindy. Shrill. Notes from a loud woman.  
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#### SHRILL

I missed it. I failed. I wasn't a woman. You only get one life. I missed it.

There is a certain kind of woman. She is graceful. She is slim. Yes, she would like to go kayaking with you. On her frame, angular but soft, a baggy T-shirt is coded as "low-maintenance," not "sloppy"; a ponytail is "sleek," not "tennis ball on top of a mini-fridge." Not only can she pull off ugly clothes, like sports sandals, or "boyfriend jeans," they somehow make her beauty thrum even more clearly. She is thrifted J.Crew. She can put her feet up on a chair and draw her knees to her chest. She can hold an ocean in her clavicle.

People go on and on about boobs and butts and teeny waists, but the clavicle is the true benchmark of female desirability. It is a fetish item. Without visible clavicles you might as well be a meatloaf in the sexual marketplace. And I don't mean Meatloaf the person, who has probably gotten laid lotsa times despite the fact that his clavicle is buried so deep as to be mere urban legend, because our culture does not have a creepy sexual fixation on the bones of meaty men.

Only women. Show us your bones, they say. If only you were nothing but bones.

America's monomaniacal fixation on female thinness isn't a distant abstraction, something to be pulled apart by academics in women's studies classrooms or leveraged for traffic in shallow "body-positive" listicles ("Check Out These Eleven Fat Chicks Who You Somehow Still Kind of

#### Bones

Want to Bang—Number Seven Is Almost Like a Regular Woman!—it is a constant, pervasive taint that warps every single woman's life. And, by extension, it is in the amniotic fluid of every major cultural shift.

Women matter. Women are half of us. When you raise every woman to believe that we are insignificant, that we are broken, that we are sick, that the only cure is starvation and restraint and smallness; when you pit women against one another, keep us shackled by shame and hunger, obsessing over our flaws rather than our power and potential; when you leverage all of that to sap our money and our time—that moves the rudder of the world. It steers humanity toward conservatism and walls and the narrow interests of men, and it keeps us adrift in waters where women's safety and humanity are secondary to men's pleasure and convenience.

I watched my friends become slender and beautiful, I watched them get picked and wear J.Crew and step into small boats without fear, but I also watched them starve and harm themselves, get lost and sink. They were picked by bad people, people who hurt them on purpose, eroded their confidence, and kept them trapped in an endless chase. The real scam is that being bones isn't enough either. The game is rigged. There is no perfection.

I listened to Howard Stern every morning in college. I loved Howard. I still do, though I had to aching bow out as my feminism solidified. (In a certain light, feminism is just the long, slow realization that the stuff you love