

GUEST COLUMN

Mitch Henck: Face it – looking good helps you get ahead

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It would be like Culver's no longer selling milkshakes because of the high calorie content, or McDonald's terminating the sale of Big Macs. After all, there is a middle bun.

But that doesn't happen because sales are too high.

Now we learn that the Miss America Pageant is ending its swimsuit competition. What? In fact, the 2018 Miss Wisconsin Pageant will be the last time we ever see a swimsuit competition in the Dairy State.

"We are no longer a pageant," Miss America Board Chairwoman Gretchen Carlson said in a statement. "Miss America will represent a new generation of female leaders focused on scholarship, social impact, talent and empowerment." Oh, that.

But we were always told that physical beauty was only a small part of the total package. Miss America and Miss Wisconsin always had the talent competition and the question and answer sessions along with the evening gown part. Is that out, too?

Saying that working out in the gym and eating salads are no longer rewarded flies in the face of reality. Western culture still puts a premium on looking your best, whether we like it or not. I can tell you that during the O.J. Simpson murder trial, the women in the NBC newsroom gathered around the TV monitor every day reacting to prosecutor Marcia Clark's hairstyle or outfit. Not once during the marathon saga did I ever notice a man commenting on Johnny Cochran's tie.

As a once skinny news anchor, I would sometimes hear from a female viewer, "Hi. I'm Michelle, and I watch you on the news." After gaining 60 pounds, I would hear, "Hi. I'm Michelle. My boyfriend and I watch you on the news."

The idea that looking good doesn't help one get ahead in business or socially is like saying it doesn't really matter if the Packers win or lose.

When the first Madison Hooters restaurant opened at its once West Side location years ago, I covered the protest marchers outside the doors. The National Organization for

Women (NOW) president told me women were being hired at the restaurant based on their body parts, and it was about power. She went on to say it was about the need for male customers to have power over female servers by requiring that women at Hooters wear skimpy clothing.

I asked, "Do you think lust enters into it?" She said, "No, it's about power." I asked her whether fat ugly waiters get hired at the finest gay clubs in New York. She had no answer.

As for the pageant, of course beauty is on the inside and intellectual capacity is more important. But cosmetic appearance means a lot in Western society, whether we like it or not.

It may not mean much in electrical engineering, but it always did matter in walking across the stage in a Miss America or Miss Wisconsin pageant.

Mary Gronik, the 1985 Miss Wisconsin and spokeswoman, says a key component to the change is the "desire to make the program inclusive of all women."

That's nice. As the son of a strong, liberal mother, and as the father of a 24-year-old daughter, I am sickened by men who objectify women based on physical appearance and nothing else. But I will confess that at 56, the one major reason I want to lose weight is to impress a future boss or, yes, even a future soul mate. To do that, eating more pizza on the couch and reading a lot of books may not be enough.

Mitch Henck is a Madison, Wisconsin based commentator, broadcaster and standup comic. Watch Mitch's video, "Two Minutes with Mitch," weekdays at www.madisontalks.com. Listen to his podcasts on MadisonTalks.com, and Wednesdays at 6 p.m. on Facebook Live.

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