

top up and expose the underside of her breasts, and the other to pull her bikini bottom down low enough on her pubic bone to prove to the world that she was thoroughly waxed. Haley Clark, a former world record-holder in the one-hundred-meter backstroke and world championship gold medalist, was pictured naked and bending over in *Playboy*, in a position referred to as "presenting" when exhibited in the animal kingdom. The collective effect of these pictures of hot (and, in most cases, wet) girls with thighs parted, tiny, porny patches of pubic hair, and coy, naughty-girl pouts made it almost impossible to keep sight of the women's awesome physical gifts. But then, that may have been the whole point: Bimbos enjoy a higher standing in our culture than Olympians right now. Perhaps the athletes felt they were trading up.

- Lesser jocks are striving for their own red-light experience. "Cardio Striptease" classes are now offered at Crunch gyms in New York, Los Angeles, Miami, San Francisco, and Chicago. "Strong, powerful women are sharing it," Los Angeles instructor Jeff Costa told me. These strong, powerful women are encouraged to attend their workout sessions in bras and thongs to add frisson to the fantasy that they are *real strippers*, who have mysteriously come to symbolize sexual liberation despite the fact that it is their job to *fake* arousal. "Stripping equals sex!" Costa said. "Look at music videos, Victoria's Secret ads, all this

stuff . . . lap dancing is everywhere! Ask anyone doing choreography right now: This is where it's at." Costa proudly told me that a mother had recently brought her daughter and eight of the girl's friends to one of his classes for a sweet sixteen celebration.

- ABC aired the first televised Victoria's Secret fashion show in 2001. "Security is tight, and so are the girls!" quipped host Rupert Everett. It was a cavalcade of legs and breasts interspersed with centerfoldish interviews with the models—one aspired to fly to the moon, another loved animals. At first, people were surprised and a little rattled to see soft-core on network television during prime time. But a panty procession would soon seem quaint, compared to the tidal wave of reality shows that swept over television and brought our culture that much closer to a raunch aesthetic and state of mind.

Harem-themed reality shows were particularly successful. In *The Bachelor, Who Wants to Marry a Millionaire?*, *Joe Millionaire*, and *Outback Jack*, troupes of women were secluded with one man in various bodice-ripper fantasy locales, like a castle or a McMansion or the wilds of Australia. There the women engaged in competitions, many of which involved bikinis, to show who among them was the hottest and the hungriest. Contestants for the hunk spoke with fetishistic longing about getting married and, more importantly, about their fantasy weddings before they'd ever met the groom. A contestant on