

# Bombshell a victim of human nature

Vickie Lynn Hogan passed away last month. She was 39. She was married to a billionaire. She was a Supreme Court litigant supported by the Bush administration. She was Anna Nicole Smith.

Conservative pundits point to her career as a stripper and centerfold, her multiple marriages, her out-of-wedlock child and her substance abuse problems as an example of a life with no moral compass. Liberals drone on about celebrity culture, society's judging women by their looks and the crass pursuit of fame and wealth in modern America. It's all so predictable.

In one sense, they're both right. But in another sense, they're very, very wrong. The real culprits are the forces of human nature, shaped through millions of years of the history of our species.

Vickie must have learned the advantages of beauty at a young age. Raised by a single mother, married at 16, separated, with a 1-year-old son two years later, she eventually took up stripping and made more money than she ever had in her life. Next, she tried out for Playboy. The rest is history.

History and human nature. It's human nature that men respond to the bare female body. It's why young Amazon tribesmen carve crude female pictures into tree trunks. It's why women in Islamic societies wear veils, but walk uncovered in the West. Where women are subjugated, the burden is on them to avoid distracting men. Where women are equal, the burden is on men to restrain themselves.

It's also a fact of nature that beauty in women is not merely cultural. As noted in The Gazette last Tuesday, much of beauty is measurable and objective. Full lips, symmetrical features, smooth skin, large eyes and curves in the right places indicate youth, fertility and higher levels of female hormones. Men everywhere find that attractive, for reasons that shouldn't be surprising.

Is it any better for us guys? Not really. Women respond to male beauty, but it's more complicated than that. Because of their larger parental investment (only women get pregnant, and it's a big risk), women are choosy. They look for power, wealth and status in a man, and every guy who's been through high school knows those



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aren't distributed fairly. There are reasons the quarterback dates the cheerleader. There are reasons Smith married a billionaire.

Even the culture of celebrity that Smith was so steeped in has its roots in human nature. We all want to be known, to impact others, to have a sense that we matter. We are drawn to the fame of others in the hope that some of it will rub off on us. We know it's ridiculous, but our subconscious fascination with celebrity is hard to fight.

Sadly, even Smith's death can be linked to human nature: The desire for chemically induced pleasure. Our brains produce natural opiates that, long ago, helped us survive dangerous situations. We don't face those situations today, but our nervous system couldn't care less. It still craves that sensation, and for many it's hard to resist.

So if human nature is so compelling and destructive, why don't we all perish in competition for mates or awash in intoxicants? Because for the past few thousand years, we've had civilization and morality to help us fight back. As we mature and gain wisdom, we start to figure out that natural inclinations aren't always right. They can be fought, and if not completely defeated, at least shaped to better ends.

For some, tragically, this never happens. It's especially risky at either end of the spectrum. The very poor, the mega-rich, the genetically short-changed and the ultra-beautiful are all too likely to succumb to the temptations for which our fragile sense of right and wrong is our only defense. For those people, the civilizing restraints of family, religion, morality and common sense are often no match for the darker forces of human nature lurking just below the surface.

Anna Nicole Smith didn't die because of her sins. Nor did she die from some fundamental flaw in society that feminist politics can fix. She died because her looks, while getting her what she wanted, tapped into the raging torrents of human nature that civilization seeks to master. Anna Nicole Smith was, quite literally, drop-dead gorgeous.

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