

Body of Lies

By Simone Sokol

It's too easy for me to open my Instagram account. However, it's not as easy to scroll through my feed. At my fingertips are countless photos of pretty girls, posing like supermodels: "perfect" bodies, "perfect" faces, "perfect" lives. It feels like they're smirking at my weird, awkward body.

I'm not alone. "When I look at other people's photo albums, the comparing is automatic," 18-year-old Kirby told researchers conducting a study for the National Eating Disorders Association. "I end up feeling like crap. I went to Photoshop a picture of myself on Facebook.... Then I stopped myself, thinking, 'This is not who I am. I want to be who I am.'"

Almost from birth we are bombarded with images of girls and women who meet an idealized standard of "beauty"—starting with the toys we play with. The most notorious example is Barbie, whose figure is literally impossible to achieve. "If Barbie were an actual woman," the *Huffington Post* calculated, "she would be 5'9" tall, have a 39" bust, an 18" waist, 33" hips and a size 3 shoe. She'd have to walk on all fours due to her proportions." Barbie is not a thing of the past; the *Global Times* calculated 58 million Barbies are sold each year around the world.

Many popular TV shows also portray corrosive representations of women's bodies. *Toddlers and Tiaras*, a reality show that aired from 2009 to 2016, featured girls as young as two competing in beauty pageants. In addition, many major brands for girls adopt slogans that practically beg us to have eating disorders. Brandy Melville, a clothing line for teens, only recently stopped using the catchphrase "one size fits all", though they still sell tightly fitting one sized clothing. Seeing ads like this have even contributed to my own desire to be skinnier.

By the time we are teens, all this toxicity builds up to the point where girls take to physically harming themselves to achieve an unachievable body type. An estimated 32 million Americans—most of them women and girls—suffer from eating disorders.¹ Each year, another 17 million have cosmetic surgery,

¹ The National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders

including breast augmentations, nose reshapings, and tummy tucks.²

Not all media sources are horrible. In fact, we need media to promote healthier depictions of women's bodies. As *The New York Times* has reported, programs like Curves, the country's fastest-growing fitness center, "are more welcoming to larger women than the average gym." We also need more programs both in and out of school to help women and girls recover from eating disorders--both physically *and* mentally. Overcoming stereotypes about who we should be is the only way for girls today to become who we truly are--in all our shapes and forms.

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² The American Society of Plastic Surgeons