Women’s Health and Body Image

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Inspiring Woman: Riva Lehrer
by Emily Follin

Too infrequently when we look at art do we see honest or fair portrayals of disabled subjects. When we do see the disabled in pictures, it is either in such a way as to look grotesque or as a medical photograph used for description of a condition. The disabled are often robbed of their identities in these portrayals. The pictures are voyeuristic at best and downright insulting at worst. However, at least one artist is working to correct this through her own work. Riva Lehrer is an artist with a disability who paints the disabled in a way that restores their individual identities.

Riva Lehrer was born in Cincinnati in 1958. She was born with a condition known as spina bifida myelomeningocele (4). Spina bifida, also known as “cleft spine” is a condition where the vertebrae and spinal canal do not close fully before birth. This causes the cord and tissues to protrude from the child’s back. This birth defect can result in loss of bladder or bowel control; partial or complete paralysis and loss of sensation in the legs; weakness of hips, legs, and feet; abnormal feet or legs such as clubfoot; or build up of fluid inside the skull (1). Because of her condition, Lehrer has needed 43 surgeries over her lifetime and has had over 300 hospital visits (4).

Her primary school education was completed at Condon School for Handicapped Children. This school, founded in 1921, was one of the first schools in the United States to provide disabled children with a standardized education. Prior to these schools, disabled children were often institutionalized with no hope of becoming self-sufficient individuals (3). While attending this school, she was surrounded by other children with a variety of disabilities, and it provided her a place where she could develop her own identity. However, outside of school, she was still well aware of the stigma that her disability generated. Between her awareness of other people’s judgment and her own concept of self-identity, she developed a great interest in biology, anatomy, and the natural world. She became very interested in the ways that people’s bodies influence the course of their lives, and she began to investigate this through her art (3).

At first, her art was not accepted by critics. People were uninterested in art that depicted the disabled (3). In 1980, she moved to Chicago, and in 1997, she connected with a community of disabled artists. These artists, like Lehrer, tried to explore the images of disability in new ways through their art. This group inspired Lehrer to begin painting her Circle Stories series of paintings (3).

Riva Lehrer’s paintings explore disabled bodies without apology and without reductionism. Each painting has its individual complex symbolism that depicts various aspects of its subject’s life. Her subjects are shown as people intertwined with symbolism rooted in a kind of magical realism, and their disability is painted as only one aspect of who they each are (2).

Over the years, she has amassed a number of awards for her work. In 2006, she won the Wynn Newhouse Award for Excellence; in 2008, she won the Three Arts Foundation of Chicago grant for artistic achievement; and in 2009, she was awarded the Prairie Fellowship at the Ragdale Foundation. She has also won awards from the Illinois Arts Council, University of Illinois, and the National Endowment for the Arts (2). Currently, she works as the curator for Cultural Programs of Access Living of Chicago and as an adjunct professor at the School of Art Institute of Chicago (2).

This woman, whose parents were told she would probably never walk and would probably have some sort of brain damage, has proven her doctors wrong and has excelled despite her disability. She has come to terms with her own condition and has reclaimed her identity through her own successes. In her paintings, she attempts to restore the identities of her subjects by painting them as they are and making them both beautiful and complex.

Sources:


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Unpretty: Seeing Behind the Makeup  
by Carrisa Sacherski

They say beauty is in the eye of the beholder, but what is beauty? In today’s society our sense of beauty is based on high fashion, cosmetics, and body types. We have grown up in a generation where other people’s perception of your beauty depends on how much effort you put into your appearance. In a world of Photoshop and air brushing we hold each other to ridiculous standards, which are often unattainable. In the United States alone, women spend $7 Billion on cosmetics every year. This includes many superfluous beauty products like anti-wrinkle creams and de-aging lotions (1). However, this isn’t a new trend. Make-up and “beauty” enhancers date back to the time of the Egyptians. The earliest records of make-up come from 3000 B.C when the Egyptians used soot and other natural ingredients to enhance their features and create a signature look (2).

But why do we do it? Why do many women feel it necessary to put on make-up? Leaving aside the idea that it is their personal choice to do so, is there an underlying cause? Why is it that natural is not considered beautiful? Has anyone ever taken into consideration that leaving yourself without make-up and other enhancers does not leave you “ugly” but leaves you, you? Many women don’t realize the health risks that come with beauty products and other forms of “beauty” including tanning booths and beds. For example, did you know that in the U.S., cosmetics are not subjected to testing by the FDA and the make-up that goes on the market does not have to be pre-screened for consumers (1)? That means that any chemicals, pathogens or other health risks that lie in beauty products go undetected, which puts a lot of women at risk.

One of the other major health risks posed to beauty comes from tanning beds and booths. This craze is driven by media stars that appear tan, happy, and healthy. However, tanning is dangerous. It’s known to cause melanoma, one of the deadliest forms of skin cancer (3). Those most susceptible to this are teens and young adults. This makes that idea even scarier. How many people who are pushing the natural beauty movement, maybe we will be able to see a change. When we pass by the tanning booths and put down our money, we can begin to see ourselves in a new light. For many, make-up is a form of expression or an art form which is completely respectable. However, when it becomes a way to cover up or hide yourself, it is time to examine your motivation. If we could all just take a day to go out without make-up, we might all begin to try to see ourselves in a better light. So, try it. Go to class, the corner store, into town without make-up, and “beauty” enhancers and begin to embrace their natural beauty. Once the sixty days were over, they started their website to share their findings and thoughts with the world. With work like theirs and that of other women who are pushing the natural beauty movement, maybe we will be able to see a change. When we pass by the tanning booths and put down our money, we can begin to see ourselves in a new light.

Did you know that even in the Victorian times women often set out to have the ideal complexion? During the 1800’s, women in the royal families of Europe were perceived as beautiful if they were pale. To that end, women would have servants and “nurses” attach leeches to them to take blood from their bodies to make them paler. If that didn’t work, they used some crude needle to drain the blood from their bodies (4). I bet you’re wondering why they would do that. For the answer, just look at today’s society. It may not be as bloody, but we are still finding life threatening ways to become “beautiful”. Why? It’s been said that “beauty is pain”, but when your life is on the line is it really worth it?

In recent decades, people have been trying to find a way to combat the media’s influence on women. I found one website called thenakedfaceproject.com (5). It is a project started by two women who decided to see what it would be like to go without all beauty products for an entire sixty days. As strange as it may sound, through this experiment their eyes were opened to a world they had not previously seen. They were able to look at themselves without make-up and other enhancers and begin to embrace their natural beauty. Once the sixty days were over, they started their website to share their findings and thoughts with the world.

Sources:

(2) “ScienceBlogs.” ScienceBlogs.
(5) “The Naked Face Project.” The Naked Face Project.
The Surge in Cosmetic Surgery
by Skyla Seamans

The media’s focus on body aesthetics has led to an enormous boom in the cosmetic surgery industry. Just last year, Americans spent over 10 billion on cosmetic procedures, which is a five percent increase from 2010 and a staggering 87 percent increase from 2000 (1). This is because cosmetic enhancement is deeply rooted in our culture; both the desire to reach a specific beauty ideal and our culture’s value on youth pressure women and men to alter their appearances. In addition to diet and exercise, cosmetic surgery is becoming part of the population’s routine to obtain a fit and younger looking exterior. Plus, cosmetic surgery has become more accessible to everyone; it is no longer seen as something only celebrities and the wealthy have. The number of procedures, from breast implants to Botox, exceeded 14 million in 2011, according to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (1). Those who may never have considered surgery in the past are making the leap to so called perfection.

Many people use the terms ‘cosmetic surgery’ and ‘plastic surgery’ interchangeably, but there is a clear difference. Cosmetic surgery is used to enhance a person’s appearance in order to reach a certain aesthetic ideal. On the other hand, plastic or reconstructive surgery focuses on repairing birth defects, developmental abnormalities, traumatic injuries, infections, tumors, or diseases. This surgery reforms an atypical body part or facial feature. A person seeks reconstructive surgery because of a malformation of the body that he or she would like to have corrected. Others need plastic surgery because of health complications. Examples of this would be repairing a cleft lip, broken nose, or a congenital heart problem. This surgery is necessary for a person’s health and wellbeing, while cosmetic surgery takes a normal body structure and alters it to fit that person’s personal body ideal and to build better self-esteem (2).

The most common cosmetic procedure is Botox injections, with 5.7 million procedures performed in 2011. This number has greatly flourished since 2000, when Botox was rarely used. Botox appeals to both men and women and is the least expensive of all cosmetic procedures, costing an average of $375 each time. Its rising popularity represents the growing desire for a youthful and relaxed appearance. The treatment is not only available for the wealthy and famous, but also for anyone looking to change their appearances in order to enhance self-esteem, increase social acceptance, and possibly to secure job advantages (3). Although the procedure does not involve surgery and is performed in a doctor’s office, it is still viewed as cosmetic surgery because it alters a person’s appearance through injections. Facial lines and wrinkles, which develop over time, are this procedure’s main targets. Although used mostly for aesthetic reasons, it also treats a variety of health problems such as back pain, muscle weaknesses, and headaches.

Breast enhancement and augmentation is the most popular surgical cosmetic procedure. In 2011, over 330,000 breast enhancement procedures were completed in the United States (4). This is a 40 percent increase over the past decade. The average cost of a breast augmentation ranges from $5,000 to $15,000, depending on the surgeon and the amount of work done. Data released by the American Society of Plastic Surgeons shows that breast enhancement, through lifts and implants, remains a priority for women who seek cosmetic surgery. However, nose jobs, liposuction, and lip augmentation are all declining (5). Liposuction, eyelid surgery, abdominoplasty, and breast reduction are also in the top five most common cosmetic procedures. Others include chin augmentation, brow lifts, buttocks lifts, laser hair removal, neck lifts, breast reductions, and so on. Any dissatisfaction with a person’s ears, eyes, face, nose, hair, stomach, or overall body can be altered through cosmetic surgery. The most expensive form of surgery is a lower body lift at $7,247. Following this is a facelift at $6,231 in 2011 (6).

For many patients, cosmetic surgery leads to an increase in self-esteem and confidence as well as a decrease in social anxiety due to poor body image. Others may undergo personality changes, from reserved and withdrawn to outgoing. Studies have also shown a positive connection between attractiveness and professional recognition, hiring decisions, promotions, and salary levels due to emphasis placed on physical appearance in the workforce (7). Surgery to change a person’s outward appearance can have positive effects on that person’s social status,

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Aging is a reality that all of us face, unless you are a vampire. (If you are a vampire, I assume you have to deal with bigger problems than aging, such as maintaining your sanity from century to century and avoiding people with the last name “Helsing”.)

Ultimately, for most of the rest of us, gray hairs proliferate and wrinkles deepen with each passing birthday. But as with most things, the physical process of aging is filtered through the lens of culture, and impacts men and women differently. In some cultures, age is venerated, and so the older woman comes to be treated with a degree of respect that she did not enjoy in her youth (though she is still often under the social control of her male relatives). However, in modern Western culture, women are harshly judged on their appearance; women have to be beautiful, and beauty is synonymous with youth.

Recently, actress Ashley Judd spoke out against media speculation about her appearance. Some media outlets commented on her alleged weight gain, and “puffy face,” and suggested that “she better watch out” because her husband would soon start “looking for his second wife” (4). Judd (a 43-year-old actress who, by her own admission, has few visible signs of aging), replied that her detractors were perpetuating a standard of beauty that punished all women, but especially older women. The kind of comments they had made emphasized that women’s worth was in their bodies alone, and diminished women's accomplishments and potential (4).

Older women face a number of challenges. They are more likely than men to live alone (since they may outlive their spouse, because women live longer than men), and to live in poverty. Some of this is due to a lifetime of sexist discrimination; women receive far lower social security payments than men, since women are more likely to have worked part-time jobs lacking benefits or to be dependent on their husband’s income. However, female elders also live in a place of intersecting prejudices; ageism (discrimination against a person due to their age) becomes particularly insidious when it is combined with sexism and objectification of women. One study discovered that participants viewed older women as passive and less willing to take risks than older men (2).

These kinds of stereotypical views can have serious impact on women’s lives, especially if women try to change careers later in life. Avoiding this discrimination may encourage a woman to try to fight signs of aging; looking young may mean looking employable.

Why this conflation of beauty and youth? Some antifeminists suggest that it has to do with men’s innate biological preferences for younger women, whose youthful appearance signals their fertility; men who don’t prefer younger women are unlikely to pass on their genes (6). This seems absurd to me. I wasn’t aware that sexual preferences were inherited [and Darwin himself noted that sexual selection didn’t apply to humans (1)]. Additionally, the perception of beauty is neither static, nor universal; it varies widely through time and across cultures. Most likely, it is not biology, but culture that seeks to perpetuate itself through equating beauty with youth.

In her excellent book, The Beauty Myth, Naomi Wolf analyzes the numerous ways that unrealistic and narrow beauty ideals are used to control women. She suggests that aging is considered “unbeautiful” because older women are often more powerful. They have more control over their lives, finances, and bodies than younger women and this is anathema in a patriarchal system. This also serves as a way to pit women against each other. If young women fear or hate older ones (because of their power), and older women fear or hate young ones (because of their “beauty”) then women cannot form alliances across generations and actually challenge male supremacy.

Fear of aging also serves as a form of financial control. In an ultra-capitalist economy, self-doubt is profit; it’s easy to sell products to someone who feels that they need to be fixed. Anti-aging creams and lotions, like the snake oil of latter days, is big business, grossing well over $3 billion dollars annually in the United States alone. These are expensive items: one of the top-selling anti-aging creams costs $94 for two ounces (see Sephora.com). When one considers that 24% of women (as opposed to 1% of men) report using these creams (2), and that women make on average 75 cents to every dollar that a man makes…one must wonder whether the obsession with fighting aging multiplies the gender wealth gap. These items are also of dubious effectiveness; it is just not possible for these creams to penetrate deeply enough into skin to reverse wrinkles (1).

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Trans Body Image
by Andrew McNamara

I never really had any body image issues growing up. I was assigned female at birth, and while I was relatively “butch” (short hair, usually men’s clothes, and a less-than-lady like attitude), as well as fat, I never felt out of place or bad about the way I looked. This pretty much all changed when I started to delve more into my gender identity.

I came out as transgender when I was 18 and immediately had a heightened awareness of my body. Things that I had never even thought were there suddenly were all I could see. My hands weren’t big, I wasn’t tall enough, and my hips were too wide; I noticed everything and compared it to that of a cisgender (someone who identifies with their assigned sex) male, but being biologically female there was just no way that I could mirror them exactly. I started to resent my own body.

One of the biggest issues for most transmen (someone who was assigned female at birth, but identifies as male) and a big personal issue for me is binding. Binding is when someone tries to conceal their breasts usually by using compression vests, also known as binders. Binders are known as a safe form of binding, because they were specifically built for this reason, but prolonged use or even weather can make them very difficult to use. Wearing one every day for more than 8 hours is not recommended, you shouldn’t wear it for more than 5-6 days out of the week, you should be able to breathe freely in it, and you should also be able to have full range of motion. Not following these rules can have detrimental effects (1). I personally have experienced chronic chest and back pain, as well as cuts (mostly from newer or tighter binders) from wearing it everyday. In the summer the heat can cause rashes, cysts, or acne due to the binder not allowing your pores to breathe. Not all transmen have access, resources, or the funds to get a binder though, so sometimes ace bandages or even duct tape are used: neither are recommended and both can cause even more horrible problems (3). Although binding can be a painful process, it’s necessary for some transmen who have a huge disconnect with their chests.

Another body image issue that trans people may have concerns their voice. I never really thought about the way my voice sounded until coming out, when suddenly getting “ma’am” or “hello miss” over the phone really got to me. I tried to make my voice sound deeper by doing vocal range exercises, but nothing ever worked well enough. Even now, after being on testosterone injections for almost two years, I don’t feel that I have a very deep voice. It can be tough, especially when you think you are passing (appearing as your desired gender) really well but your voice “gives you away” when you speak. Transwomen (someone who was assigned female at birth, but identifies as male) similarly can have dysphoria regarding their voice, especially if their vocal chords have thickened during puberty, which can make it very hard to reach a higher range. Even after having surgeries to make their vocal range higher, it can still not be “high enough” and can be a risky procedure.

Body hair is another common dysphoria for a lot of transgender people including me. For some transwomen, growing unwanted facial hair can be very emotional, and even the lengthy and sometimes painful electrolysis procedures may not work as hoped. For a lot of older transwomen, and transmen who have been on testosterone for long enough, balding can be a real problem as well. It’s not uncommon for some transmen, like me, to not really have any body hair, and body hair can make it easier to be read.

Not only do trans people experience some of these body image issues and others, they may feel extra pressure to conform to societal expectations of their gender identity for fear of being harassed. A 2011 study done by The National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (2) reported that transgender people experienced higher rates of hate violence with serious injuries (11.8%) as compared to non-transgender men (6.8%) and non-transgender women (1.3%). They also reported that transgender people were twice as likely to experience assault or discrimination, and one and a half times

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Barbie Millicent Roberts was introduced to the world by Ruth Handler (co-founder of Mattel) at the American Toy Fair in New York City in 1959. This new doll was supposed to be a teen fashion model. She stood (and still stands) 11.5 inches tall, with a 5 inch bust, a 3 ¼ inch waist, and a weight of 7 ¼ ounces (1). Since her creation, 1 billion Barbies have been sold and she has outlasted decades of competitors (2). At first glance, this doll may seem like a harmless toy and at first it probably was. However, think about the media images girls today are pelted with daily: skinny is pretty. Kids are exposed to media images and messages starting at a very young age. Are toys like Barbie reinforcing these messages and instituting a negative body image in young girls?

Consider this: if Barbie were a real person she would stand about six feet tall, with a 39 inch bust, an 18 inch waist, and 33 inch hips. She would weigh about 110 lbs (3). The average woman is about five feet three inches tall, with a 37 inch waist, and weighs about 164 lbs (4). Some might wonder, what’s the big deal? Little girls do not notice stuff like that; they are just playing with toys, right? Some think we need to give girls more credit, and that they will not take Barbie’s shape seriously. Is that really giving girls more credit, or is it simply brushing young children off as being oblivious to the world around them? Studies have shown that children are not oblivious and that girls really do take their dolls’ images to heart.

A few years ago a study was done with 6 to 10 year old Dutch girls. The girls in the study were randomly given dolls to play with. They got a Barbie Doll, an Emme doll, a Tyler doll or non-shapely LEGOS (the control). After playing with the dolls for about ten minutes they were given a questionnaire about body image. The questionnaire showed no difference in perception of body image. However, the girls were then given food and it became evident that which toy they had been given affected the food intake of these girls. After playing with the doll for ten minutes and filling out the questionnaire, they were given bowls of chocolate covered peanuts, pre-weighed and left alone to eat them. Results showed that the girls playing with the average size Emme dolls ate significantly more than the girls playing with the thinner Barbie and Tyler dolls and the control group playing with LEGOs (5).

While the results of this study are intriguing, it may also raise the question, who are Emme and Tyler? In a market where Barbie is the biggest player, what other toys are out there that may be affecting young children’s view of their bodies? Tyler is a relatively new fashion doll. She is very similar to Barbie in that she is ultra thin and meant to be model-like. She is more for collection purposes than playing purposes (6). Interestingly enough, the average sized Emme doll was created by Robert Tonner of Tonner Doll Co., the same man and company that brings us the model-like Tyler Doll. Emme (pictured to the right) was created in honor of plus-sized model Emme Aronson. Originally the doll was just supposed to be a pricey collectible, but she was so popular when she premiered at the 2002 American International Toy Fair in New York City that Tonner decided to create a children’s version of her (7). Tonner’s other doll collections mostly consist of size two dolls and Emme’s size sixteen was a well received and refreshing difference. But why has this doll, which came out nearly ten years ago, not become a household name like Barbie? Could it be that parents and children are put off by a larger doll that is different from what they are used to? Or perhaps it is the fact that the average Barbie doll can be bought at Walmart for around ten dollars while Emme premiered at thirty dollars each.

Barbie may be one of the most famous dolls out there, but she is far from the only perpetrator of representing an unhealthy body image. Another great example of this problem is Bratz dolls. Bratz were introduced as sassy, multi-racial alternatives to Barbie (8). It is clear that the Bratz creators were attempting to reach a wider range of girls by creating multiple dolls of different races. This may be one way that these dolls can be seen as an improvement over Barbie, but it is the only way. Like Barbie, Bratz dolls have tiny waists, long legs, and overall nearly impossible proportions. They also have dis-
Start a Revolution: Love your Body  
by Brianna Vear

Fifty-four percent of women would rather be hit by a truck than be fat! Eighty-one percent of ten year olds are afraid of being fat (1). It is estimated that by the age of thirteen, fifty-three percent of American girls are displeased with their body. By the age of seventeen this number grows to seventy-eight percent (2). Ten million girls and women (compared to one million boys and men) suffer from eating disorders, which is more than the number of women who suffer from breast cancer (1).

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, body image refers to a “subjective picture of one’s own physical appearance established both by self-observation and by noting the reactions of others.” In essence, body image is how you see your own body. In a society that is plagued with an incredibly strict and unforgiving definition of beauty, it is no surprise that so many women and girls have a negative view of their bodies.

Americans have body image issues that last their entire lifetimes. This is not surprising when one in three articles in teen magazines and fifty percent of the advertisements focus on appearance (1). The average fashion model at 5’11 and 117 pounds is thinner than ninety-eight percent of American women (2). If mannequins were women, they would be too thin to bear children. Negative body image has a serious negative impact on the everyday lives of women. Sixty-seven percent of women ages 15-64 withdraw from life-engaging activities like giving an opinion, going to school and going to the doctor because they do not like how they look (1).

As a society we need to stop trying to meet the impossible-to-achieve “beauty ideal” our society sets for us and instead focus on the “healthy ideal” which looks different for every woman. It is important that we help shape healthy body images for ourselves, but also that we do not hinder others from achieving a healthy body image. Fat talk is a serious problem in our society, in fact it is believed that ninety three percent of college students “fat talk”. Fat talk refers to comments made about weight and appearance. “She’s too fat to wear that shirt,” “She looks gross,” “she’s totally anorexic,” “I am so fat, I need to lose ten pounds.” Fat talk does not always sound negative (oh you look great, you lost weight), but never the less it is fat talk.

Have you ever eaten something and thought “oh I feel so fat?” Well this, too, is fat talk. When you say this it really means you are full of emotion: shame, guilt, fear or sadness. When you feel guilty about food, says nutritionist Caitlyn Boyle “you are experi-
Each year we collect used cell phones and chargers to be donated to women who are survivors of domestic violence. They are sent to an organization that reprograms the phones and distributes them to women to be used as a life line in the case of an emergency.

Contact Us: x5497, womenscenter@mcla.edu, or Campus Center Room 322.
career, and his or her own self appearance.

However, surgeries do have a long recovery period and can lead to health risks and complications as well as an increased dissatisfaction with appearance. No matter what a person calls it—cosmetic, plastic, reconstructive—it is still surgery. Loss of lives, limbs, scarring, and disfigurement can be results of surgery gone wrong. While these extreme risks are rare, patients are still vulnerable to infections, excessive bleeding, blood clots, tissue death, loss or change of sensation, and paralysis. (7) There can also be psychological consequences due to the expectations a patient has going into the surgery but not achieving them, which is called post operative depression. While the risks vary from person to person, and satisfaction with surgery is completely individual, certain risks are common to all surgery and the recovery period is inevitable.

Extensive surgery or an obsession with changing one’s appearance cosmetically can lead to Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD). People suffering from BDD repeatedly change their body parts to the point of obsession, which interferes with other aspects of life. Studies show that 7 to 12 percent of cosmetic surgery patients have some form of BDD. Plus, the majority of BDD patients who have cosmetic surgery do not improve; they even seek multiple procedures on the same body part or feature (8). BDD is a long-term mental illness that affects men and women equally. The most common areas of concern are skin imperfections such as acne, scars, and wrinkles, as well as hair, facial features, and body weight. Because of the shame that accompanies BDD, it is difficult to diagnosis the problem and many cases of BDD go unrecognized.

The media, celebrities, and the increase in “Reality TV” all have an immense influence on the growing popularity and obsession with cosmetic surgery. People are choosing to undergo these procedures because of the media’s high standards of beauty and their dissatisfaction with their bodies because of this. According to the Toronto Sun, cosmetic surgeons say that the most commonly mentioned celebrities include Angelina Jolie, Brad Pitt, Jennifer Aniston, Jennifer Lopez, and reality television stars Kim Kardashian and Mike Sorrentino from Jersey Shore. This has grave effects on teenagers who are feeling pressured to be thin, beautiful, and flawless. Altered advertisements, surgically enhanced celebrities, and reality television are the culprits in promoting this ideal. In 2010, about 220,000 cosmetic procedures were performed on teens between 13 and 19 years old. However, very few studies have been conducted to observe the safety and long-term risks of these procedures for adolescents (9). Although studies show that cosmetic surgery does lead to individual satisfaction and increased self-esteem in many cases for both men and women, it is still major surgery with complications and risks and the decision to undergo such procedures must be taken seriously.

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(2) Denenberg, Steven. “What is the Difference between Plastic and Cosmetic Surgery?” Facialsurgery.com


(8) “Body Dysmorphic Disorder: Focusing on Appearance.” Teens Health. kidshealth.org

(9) “Plastic Surgery.” Teens Health. kidshealth.org

Image Courtesy of www.cosmeticsurgerythailand.com
The Beauty of Aging, continued

This analysis is meant to rebuke the companies that make such pricey but useless creams, not the consumers. Wolf points out that advertisements for anti-aging products use language that deliberately plays on women’s insecurities. One product from Almay claims to “counteract the stresses and strains of today’s lifestyle” (1), and for many women, who may be single mothers or low-wage workers or who may be performing 90% of the housework in addition to a full-time job, an antidote to stress and strain may be exactly what they need. Spending money on these products is a way of trying to find security.

How can we undo this, and really achieve a positive, secure way to age? This may involve a reconfiguring of our views on beauty and age. A media in which women over 50 are invisible is not conducive to fostering positive images of aging; realistic depictions of older women, without scorn and without shame, are necessary. Valuing ourselves is also vitally important; blogger Catherine Redfern offers up a list of the Seven Real Signs of Aging (in contrast to the superficial, anxiety-producing lists created by the cosmetics industry), which include emotional maturity, wisdom, self-esteem, and sexual confidence. For women, the quest for beauty, when deeply analyzed, seems to really be about finding social acceptance and a sense of peace. Why not pursue these things directly?

Even the current concept of aging is peculiar—rightly speaking, we’re all aging as soon as we’re born, but when is someone old? At 50? At 30? How much of our lives do we spend being “old,” especially as life-preserving technologies become more advanced? It would be a shame and a waste of time to fight aging. Wrinkles are a sign that you’ve lived.

Sources:


Trans Body Image, continued

more likely to experience intimidation based on their gender identity. In another part of the study, they discovered that transgender women were the least likely to report the violence they experienced to the police, due to being treated with disrespect. Finally, they found that transgender people were the least likely to receive medical attention: 75% of transgender men as well as 20% of transgender women did not receive necessary medical attention, compared to the 15% of overall LGBTQH (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and HIV-affected people). These statistics exert incredible pressure on people to pass and to feel negatively about their bodies.

Body image issues are relevant for most people, but for trans people especially. A lot of transgender people feel a heightened awareness of their body, which can cause them to feel dysphoric, as well as overanalyze and constantly compare themselves to others. They may feel betrayed by their own bodies for being a certain way. They may also feel pressured to conform to societal expectations of their gender identity in fear of being a victim of hate crimes or even being denied medical attention. This is why potentially painful things like binding or electrolysis can be necessary in order for some trans people to feel comfortable in their own body. Regardless of the type of body image issue someone may have, creating safe spaces where people are respected can help reduce the dysphoria that trans people can have about their bodies.

Sources:

(1) FTM Passing Tips. February 9, 2011.


(3) Hate Violence Against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and HIV-Affected Communities. 2011.
Playing with Body Image: Barbie and Beyond, continued

portionately large heads, large lips, and a face full of makeup. The dolls not only depict an unattainable body-shape for girls, but they also take the body image problem to a new level in the form of fashion. Bratz dolls come with over-the-top, and often inappropriate clothing (9). From low-cut jeans to very high heels, it becomes clear to girls what is supposed to be cool. The profiles of each doll on the Bratz website all have some reference to fashion, clothing, and shopping.

Bratz also raise an interesting question about race and ethnicity and Barbie’s world and their relationship to body image. Barbie is often highly criticized because she supposedly is the epitome of the messed up Western beauty ideal. She’s white, she’s thin, and she’s blonde. There is nothing wrong with being any of these things, but if that is the only idealized image for growing girls, most of them will never attain it. Over the years Mattel has created a family for Barbie. When I was growing up, Barbie and her four younger sisters were all blonde. Now, at 21, I was probably a little too excited when I went to Barbie’s website for research and found Skipper to be a brunette with purple streaks in her hair. Suddenly she was a little more like me. Mattel has introduced dolls of different races and ethnicities over the years. Every so often they try to make a racial or ethnically “authentic” doll, but more often than not they do not stray too far from the stereotypical white Barbie with her thin waist and long flowing hair (10). When there is a new doll, she always plays second fiddle to Barbie. She is Barbie’s friend. She does not have her own story. Her importance is based upon her relationship to Barbie.

It all comes back to Barbie. Two Barbies are sold every second worldwide (3). Chances are every little girl in this country has at least seen a Barbie doll. It seems that with that much popularity, Barbie’s manufacturer, Mattel, has some power here. What if Mattel brought another doll to the forefront? What if they put a larger doll on equal footing with anorexic-like Barbie? What if they put a Hispanic doll on equal footing with ultra-white Barbie? What if they put a redhead on equal footing with super blonde Barbie? Right now Mattel seems to set the standard for beauty. What if they were able and willing to change that standard?

Sources:


(7) Flanigan, Robin. "Plus-size collectible Emme doll is an even bigger hit than expected." The Seattle Times. 04/07/02. community.seattletimes.nwsource.com


Image courtesy of blogs.laweekly.com
Start a Revolution: Love Your Body, continued

that give you a safe “high.” But do it safely, skipping a day between sessions (4).

The easiest way to love yourself is to smile! Smiling releases chemicals which increase cell reproduction and allow you to have more energy to enjoy life. You are more than your body type. Remember the non physical qualities you love about yourself (4)!

We are all unique and wonderful human beings. So let’s start a revolution. Make a vow today to love your body! End fat talk and take the steps to achieve a healthy body image. And spread the word. In the words of Dr. Suess, “Today you are You, that is truer than true. There is no one alive who is Youer than You” (5).

Sources:


Pledge To End Fat Talk

Fat talk describes all of the statements made in everyday conversation that reinforce the thin ideal and contribute to people’s dissatisfaction with their bodies.

Examples of Fat Talk:

I’m So Fat.

I need to lose 10 pounds.

She’s too fat to be wearing that dress.

Statements that are considered to be fat talk do not necessarily have to be negative; they can seem positive yet still reinforce the need to be thin.

You look great! You lost weight!

Fat talk is damaging, so join us in ending fat talk. Take the Pledge:

I, ____________, promise to eliminate fat talk from conversations with my friends, my family and myself. Starting now I will strive for a healthy ideal which I know looks different for everyone and focuses on health not weight or size. I will celebrate things about myself and the people in my life that have nothing to do with how we look. I decide to end fat talk now!!!
*Third Annual* Body Positive Picnic

Brought to You By STAGE (Students Taking Action for Gender Equality)

Friday, May 4, 2011

11-2 on The Quad
(Rain Location: Bowman Lobby)