… And Now I am Beautiful …?

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The first time I can recall having a conscious thought about my body was in second grade. My mom had enrolled me in ballet, so whether I liked it or not, I had to attend and perform with the other girls. Everyone in my class was slim and tiny; compared to them, I felt huge. My stomach angrily protruded and my thighs seemed to take up more space than necessary. I was eight years old.

Concepts of body image and body dissatisfaction can take form shockingly early, as we begin internalizing the world around us. Playing with toys and watching media that uphold certain standards instills subtle biases that influence how we see ourselves. Even at that age, I was comparing. My stomach and thighs were thoughts I could sometimes dismiss, but when I started developing breasts and had to wear a bra, the shame became harder to ignore. I would tuck the straps behind my leotard so no one would notice my secret, so no one would realize I was "different".

It would take a few more years until my friends experienced puberty, but even after they developed, I still felt larger. I remember trying to shop at the same stores as my friends, but because of the store's "one size" policy, nothing fit. It served to further isolate me. My body wasn't wrong, but it felt incompatible with the world around me.

In high school, this insecurity followed me until I met a girl who seemed completely at ease in her body. She didn't worry the way I did. Eventually, she told me she had undergone cosmetic surgery. I had dieted. I had exercised. But I hadn't attempted the permanent and guaranteed method of surgery. Talking to her made me realize that I could have the body I had wanted for so long. I could remove this burden. I made the decision. I went under the knife.

Beauty standards have always pushed women toward painful extremes. Throughout history, women have broken ribs with corsets, bound their breasts, starved themselves, binge eaten, and altered their bodies surgically. Today, the methods look different, but the pressure remains. Shaving, waxing, dyeing hair, wearing painful shoes, applying makeup, straightening curls. These acts exist on a spectrum shaped by culture and exposure. What feels extreme to one person may be routine to another.

But in this generation, that spectrum is no longer shaped primarily by magazines or runway shows. It is shaped by social media.

Social media does not reflect beauty standards—it manufactures them. Platforms built around images create an environment where bodies are constantly displayed, evaluated, and compared. Filters smooth skin. Editing apps cinch waists. Lighting and angles sculpt features. The results of cosmetic procedures are posted, documented, and normalized. When these curated images flood our screens daily, they do not register as exceptional—they begin to feel standard.

This constant exposure distorts perception. When the majority of the bodies you see online are enhanced, edited, or surgically altered, your baseline for "normal" shifts. The algorithm does not show you "average." It shows you engagement, and engagement often centers on extremes. The

result is a skewed sense of reality where hyper-curated bodies are treated as attainable and ordinary, the "ideal" to strive for.

For someone already feeling insecure, this environment is devastating. The more I scrolled, the more I saw bodies that appeared smaller, tighter, more proportional. Influencers casually shared their procedures as self-care or empowerment. Comment sections revolved around appearance. The message was subtle but constant: your body is a project and improvement is always possible.

Social media does not simply contribute to body dysmorphia. It amplifies and promotes it. When flaws are zoomed in on, when before-and-after transformations are celebrated, when surgery is framed as a quick-fix, dissatisfaction becomes normalized. Wanting to change your body is no longer an extreme response. It becomes logical.

For me, having larger breasts made me deeply insecure. I would try on dresses for prom, and nothing fit quite right. Either I couldn't zip the dress around my bust, or the top fit and the waist hung loose. Looking at photos of myself made me uncomfortable. I felt disproportionate. And in a digital world where proportions are perfected, that discomfort intensified.

I do not regret my procedure. After surgery, some of my body dysmorphia eased. I could get dressed without the same dread. I could focus on other parts of my life. In that sense, the surgery worked.

But in that relief, a harder question is raised. Why did altering my body feel like the solution? Why is it that peace came only after I changed myself to better align with the standard?

The answer is not simply patriarchy, though systems of power absolutely shape beauty standards. The more immediate and pervasive force is social media's ability to continuously reinforce one narrow aesthetic. When success, desirability, and visibility online are tied to appearance, beauty becomes currency. Those who conform are rewarded with attention and validation. Those who do not are left comparing.

Appearing beautiful has long been associated with better social treatment, more romantic options, and greater opportunity. Social media intensifies this by quantifying validation through likes, comments, and followers. Approval becomes measurable. Beauty becomes data. And when beauty is measurable, it becomes competitive.

So people adapt.

Cosmetic surgery can increase self-esteem, but it does so within a system that created the insecurity in the first place. It treats the symptom, not the source. As beauty standards grow increasingly narrow and technologically enhanced, more people will feel pressure to pursue extreme solutions to meet them.

The real issue is not that individuals choose surgery. It is that so many feel they *need* to.

If we continue pushing beauty standards toward increasingly unattainable ideals, the consequences will extend beyond individual procedures. We will see rising financial strain, physical risk, and mental health struggles as more people chase perfection that does not exist offline. The pursuit becomes endless because the standard itself is artificial and constantly evolving.

Beauty has always shifted across history. What was once desirable becomes outdated. The "perfect" body is fluid, proving that perfection itself is arbitrary. Yet social media freezes certain aesthetics, making them feel permanent, universal, and essential to obtain.

We need to separate beauty from worth. We need to normalize imperfections not as flaws to fix, but as neutral human traits. When beauty is tied to power, cosmetic surgery stops feeling like a choice and starts feeling like survival.

I altered my body and found relief. But relief should not require a scalpel. The deeper solution lies in dismantling the digital environment that distorts our perception of normal in the first place. Until we address how social media manufactures and promotes body dysmorphia, surgery will continue to feel like the most rational response to an irrational standard.

And that is the part that should unsettle us most.