

ORGANS, *not an* ORNAMENT

Before judging their bodies, women should understand the biology behind their features

story by BELLA BROCE

AT THE AGE of 8, I remember looking in the mirror and thinking, *I know what's wrong with me. My thighs are too big.* With my "1989" CD clutched in my hand, I desired to have Taylor Swift's long, slender legs.

That's *all* I wanted. I hated my thunder thighs and prayed to have legs that resembled toothpicks. My brain was trained to only see beauty in myself if I was skinny. The women I idolized were starving models in magazines, surgically-altered actresses and airbrushed female characters in media. And if I didn't look like them, then I was ugly by society's standards.

But that's not true.

As a new generation, young women need to change this stigma by understanding their bodies through biology and rejecting the idealistic female form that society forces on women.

In the renowned painting "The Birth of Venus," the Roman goddess of love and sexuality is depicted with hips twice the size of any Victoria's Secret model, a stomach not "fit" for the beach and thighs thicker than my beloved Taylor Swift. Thousands of years ago, Venus was the *epitome* of beauty – yet today she wouldn't be a front-page model.

Women have been expected to twist, turn and squeeze themselves into an unattainable body fitted for society's ideals. But that's not how our bodies are built.

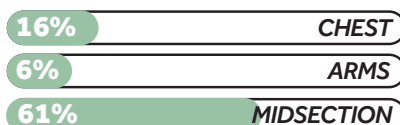
We're supposed to have rolls in our stomachs, cellulite in our thighs and love handles on our hips. *Scientifically*, women have more fat spread out throughout their bodies to prepare for pregnancy. Compared to men, women have more fat than muscle mass, making it harder for them to lose weight. From the moment puberty begins in girls, their body is developing into a "reproductive machine," according to Dr. Joan Schieber, gynecologist and obstetrician at St. Luke's Hospital of Kansas City.

Having a flat abdomen isn't a necessity from a medical standpoint in any way, according to Dr. Schieber.

And yet, in an Instagram poll of 135 people, 61% said they were most insecure about their midsection.

*Instagram poll of 274 votes

WHAT ARE YOU MOST INSECURE ABOUT?



But as women, we *need* to have more fat. Not just because our bodies need it as stored energy, but also for protection. Our abdominal wall is surrounded by bones, so both women and men rely on subcutaneous fat – fat under the skin to protect our vital organs from any impact we may encounter.

While everyone has subcutaneous fat, women have been taught to only show their midsection if they have little fat and no bloating.

During tennis practice my sophomore year, I overheard a senior talk about how she would barely eat at dinner before a dance so she wouldn't appear bloated in after-party photos.

Not only does this comment continue to spread the stigma that girls need to have flat stomachs, but it dismisses bloating as a normal reaction to food intolerance, gas, digestive problems, being on your period and carbonation.

According to my.clevelandclinic.org, roughly 75% of women experience bloating before and during their period due to a spike in the hormone progesterone. And bloating is a common side effect from drinking carbonated drinks due to the buildup of gas – like carbon dioxide – in a person's GI tract, which can cause a distended or full abdomen.

So, if you're deleting pictures from the beach because you thought your stomach looked like a beach ball after downing a Cherry Coke, who cares? Your body was just having a normal reaction to carbonation, and you *know* that drink was worth every sip.

I know how difficult it is to try to accept your body while also being dragged down by worrying about how others see you. But we've already covered that social media and society will keep feeding unrealistic physical attributes to girls at a young age if we don't step in. Be the role model that you never had and wear the crop top.

We've been trained by society to look in the mirror and have hateful comments lined up like a loaded gun.

I look 5 months pregnant in this bikini.

Why do my legs have to have so much cellulite?

I used to be so skinny. What happened?

Why endure this pain? You owe society *nothing*. So unburden yourself.

Is it worth sucking in your stomach on the beach so a guy likes your Instagram post? Is it worth nearly passing out after a workout because you *refused* to eat anything?

Stop trying to fit into a different body and embrace the one you were given. Treat your body like the temple it is, and not a prison that you're trapped in.

REAL BODIES

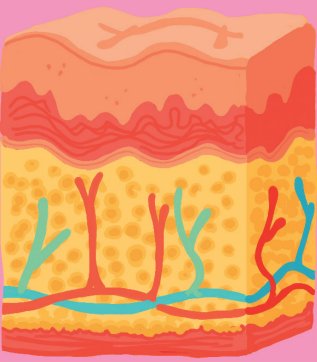
Three facts about natural occurrences in women's bodies



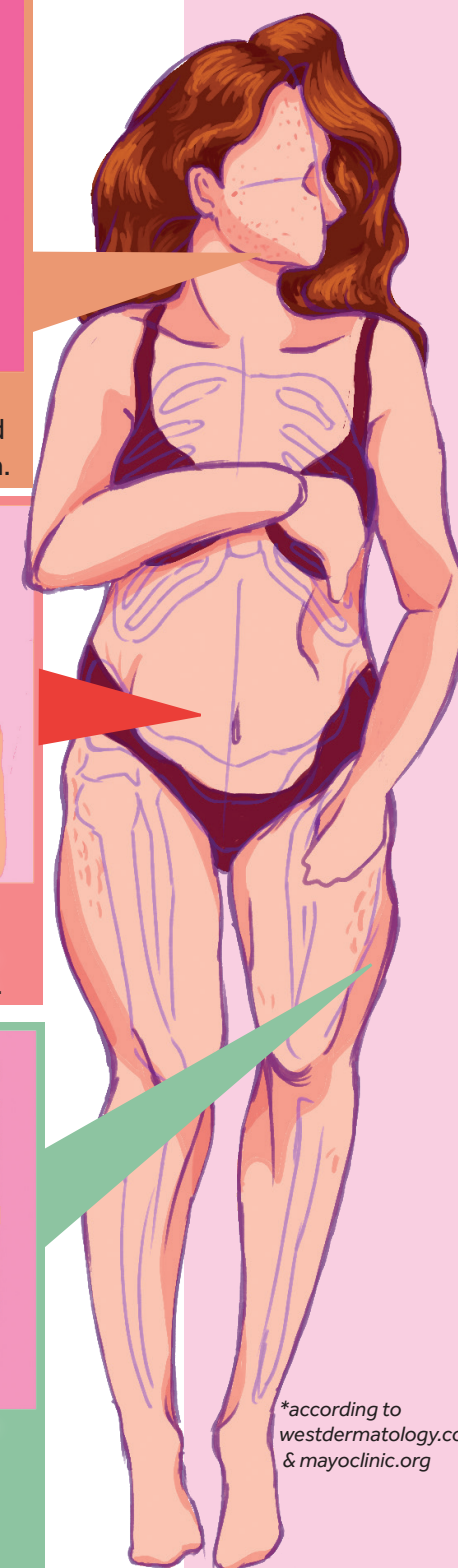
22% of adult women are affected by acne, compared to less than 5% of adult men.



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Cellulite, a variation of human skin and fat distribution, is common in adult women and **isn't** a sign of poor hygiene, fitness or health.



*according to westdermatology.com & mayoclinic.org