



Reality Check

By Cynthia Lam, 16, Staff Writer

It's easy to get swept up in the glossy images of impossibly attractive people in magazines, ads and on billboards. But it's so hard to resist these alluring pictures, even when they make us feel awful when we compare

our own healthy bodies to those processed, Photoshopped ones. And who hasn't gotten swept away by the happy endings of films that portray relationships and sexuality? Even films, like *Juno*, make teen pregnancy look good, as Juno tearfully embraces Paulie with their newborn baby. When the final credits roll, the young couple merrily plays guitar together, ending the movie with a passionate kiss as they live happily ever after.

These films rarely stress the reality of teen pregnancy and parenting, not to

mention, safer sex, being emotionally ready for sex, birth control and communicating with a partner.

As fun as it is to get carried away by the fantasy of movies, magazines and ads, it's time for a healthy dose of reality. Read on to get the truth about real bodies, sexual relationships and teen parenting. While fantasy can be fun and enjoyable at times, a good reality check will help us learn to appreciate our bodies and make smart sexual decisions.

Real People Aren't Perfect Perfect People Aren't Real

By Kait Hamilton, 17, Staff Writer

As I'm sitting with my girlfriends looking through the latest bathing suits from the Victoria's Secret catalog, we all agree that we wish we looked like the models wearing them. Skinny legs, flawless skin, flat stomach, perfect breasts and butts and no cellulite or stretch marks at all. So, we say we're going to eat healthy and do fat-burning workout videos, but we know we're reaching for something that is unreachable: perfection.

Girls aren't the only ones longing to be model-perfect. Many guys spend hours at the gym trying to get a perfect six-pack or bulging biceps, because they think that's what girls want. Even my dad works out, saying one day he's going to look like the guys in *Men's Health* magazine.

The Illusion of Perfection

Many of us have wanted that perfect body and wondered how in the world these perfect, desirable men and women come to look the way they do. But the reality is many of us who want to look like Megan Fox on the cover of *Maxim* or David Beckham in an underwear ad are sometimes striving to look like computer-generated people. Yes, it is them on the cover or in the magazine, but they might not look quite like that if you saw them in person doing the same pose, wearing the same thing.

It takes a team of people hours to make celebrities and models look the way they do in magazines and on TV. There are makeup artists, hair stylists, photographers, art

directors, graphic designers and, of course, there's a graphic artist, who is in charge of making sure that every little blemish or imperfection is removed from the photo. Once the graphic artist is done with the photo, almost every body part that can be shrunk, enlarged, removed or added has been changed. Even the women and men on the covers of these magazines probably look at themselves and wish they really looked like that!

I'm Not the Only One

The media shows us perfect bodies, which can leave us feeling bad about the healthy ones we've got. But perfect bodies are rarely real bodies, and I'm not the only one with a few imperfections.

One day I walked into the locker room to change for gym class. As I took off my shirt, I stood there in my bra wondering what people would think of me. As my friend complimented my bra, I replied, "Thank you, but it would probably look better if my left boob wasn't bigger than the right." About two seconds later, the five girls standing around me all said, "Oh my god! Me too! My left/right is bigger than the other!" I felt a lot better knowing that I wasn't alone. I realized it's normal not to have perfectly even breasts, a tiny waist, hips and a round, firm, cellulite-free butt. There's absolutely nothing wrong with my body just the way it is, so why spend time comparing myself to perfection?

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We're All Different

We need to understand that it's normal to have uneven breasts, the occasional pimple or unwanted body or facial hair. It's normal not to look like airbrushed, retouched photos of models in full makeup. And if you're a guy, it's normal to have a lot of facial hair or little facial hair, and it's normal not to have bulging muscles all over your body.

Everyone is different, and everyone has "imperfections." Let's not even call them imperfections, because our bodies with their moles, freckles, blemishes and cellulite are unique to each of us and completely normal. All of those things we fret over in the mirror are much more common than we realize, though you wouldn't know it to look at a magazine. Supermodels—believe it or not—have cellulite too; they just have people

who airbrush it off for them. Remember that the next time you're wishing you looked like that model on the cover of a magazine.

We make it hard for ourselves to be happy with the way we look when we compare

ourselves to an unrealistic perfection—one that doesn't even really exist! The sooner we can accept the way we look, the happier we'll be and the better we'll feel about our bodies. We aren't meant to look perfect, and we don't have to look like those retouched photos of models to feel good and be happy.