

Molly, a woman I went to high school with, posted a photo on Facebook with the following status update: "Have to brag a moment about my 15-year-old daughter Maggie! Sophomore class picture without a speck of makeup, not even lip gloss! [I'm] happy she's happy with her perfect self!"

Her daughter is in fact a beautiful young woman. My daughters are also beautiful young women but it made my heart sink to realize there's no way they would sit for a portrait without makeup. I don't know that I've even seen my 14-year-old without mascara in months and my youngest has taken to wearing eyeliner and blue shadow. What has Molly done right that I obviously do wrong?

A few months ago, I read an article on *Huffington Post* by Lisa Bloom, author of the book *Think: Straight Talk for Women to Stay Smart in a Dumb-Down World*. She claims 25 percent of women ages 18-34 would rather win *America's Next Top Model* than the Noble Peace Prize and 22 percent would rather lose the ability to read over their figures. Around the same time I was introduced to *Dance Moms*, a reality series about a Pittsburgh dance company, where owner and director Abby Lee Miller "molds" young girls for their illustrious careers as professional dancers.

Miller is a nightmare all on her own, but most shocking are the mothers of these young girls, one of whom claims that school is secondary to dancing class; her daughter will be on *Broadway* someday and school doesn't mat-

Miss Representation



living out loud

BY KATHRYN MARTINI

ter that much. I found myself screaming at the television: "If your daughter got a Ph.D., she could make a *real* difference in the world! You idiot! You're setting feminism back 50 years!"

This is not to say there isn't redeeming value in art and its contribution to our society, but focusing on a young girl's extracurricular activities over academics does nothing more than reinforce that what a girl *does* and how she *looks doing it* is more important than what she *knows*.

I immediately bought Ms. Bloom's book and started some serious thinking on the subject. More women now occupy college campuses than men and more women obtain advanced degrees and enter prestigious professions than ever before, but these facts aren't reflected in our mainstream culture or in the media. Women like Snooki and the Kardashians are celebrated, not for their IQs or humanitarian efforts, but rather their choice of shoes, jewelry, cocktails and husbands. This is modeled for women so it's no big surprise that a huge majority would rather focus on their weight and appearance than intelligence or success.

American women spend millions on cosmetics and salon services and the number of plastic surgeries performed rises exponentially each year; tummy tucks alone were up more than 4,000 percent between 2000-06. Women run to surgery weeks after giving birth to have a "Mommy Makeover" (usually a tummy tuck and breast augmentation), allowing them their "pre-baby" body back. Pretty soon doctors will just offer same-day service: Give birth and have plastic surgery, so the home-from-the-hospital photos look fabulous.

I have a friend who said she would never have plastic surgery because her body, now stretch-marked and saggy, tells the story of how she conceived, carried, birthed and breastfed her three beautiful children, the greatest accomplishment of her life. Few women are able to do this and I believe that my friend is an exception. I look at my own, now nearly three years past 40, face and body and wonder what happened over the last few years. Suddenly, lines and gray hairs have appeared that weren't there previously, the skin on my eyelids is looser than it was and I won't even discuss my own childbirth-ruined body. I don't em-

brace these changes as my friend has; I hate them and if I had extra money lying around, I'd probably make my own "Mommy Makeover" appointment. Does this take away from my intelligence and cause me to collude with the very sexism I balk against?

My daughters are all smart and capable young women with a long list of self-assured female relatives and friends in their lives. I don't encourage them to do well in school, I expect it, and I try each day to explain to them how the media and their environment form their opinions about themselves. Sometimes I get it right and sometimes, like when my oldest daughter misses calculus class because she can't find anything to wear, I fail.

I want to do a better job. I've tried to change how I talk to young girls. Instead of, "She looks so pretty," I say, "She looks so strong and confident." I'm also trying to love myself more. More than anything, I want to encourage young women to stand next to Al Gore and Gandhi in history rather than Tyra Banks or Heidi Klum. **J**

The documentary MISS REPRESENTATION profiles how the media portrays women, even powerful women, in an extremely negative light. The film's goal is to educate young women how this perpetuates oppression and sexism. Visit the film's website, missrepresentation.org.

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