

Dysmorphia
By Megan Winkelman

A vaguely Greek etymology cloaks the shapeless disorder in ancient allure. Even the word, stolen from my second psychiatrist, hisses through the teeth – *diss* and erupts in the mouth *MORPH* before finally sputtering out *eeaa* to coat the tongue in thick, paralyzing ash. I swallow down the sediment. Appropriate: the word is trapped in my mouth as this mind is trapped in my body.

My “distorted” brain thrives on scientific discipline. Through reductionism, I hope for salvation. In the mirror I cut myself into segments, knee to thigh, thigh to hip, hip to rib. Slicing is freedom. I am able to examine each segment and sub-segment of my physiology without self-loathing. Pinkie? Check. Elbow? Check. Shoulder? Check. In parts and then subparts I rationalize my way to a transient acceptance of my body. Ah what a wonder of mechanics and development and health, blah, blah, blah.

The bathtub walls hold me steady as I lift my thighs (globular, pale and imperfect as broken marble statues) from the milky water. Could these awkward slabs of muscle and fat become wings? Could I snap the tendons and refashion smooth junctures on my sharp shoulders? Maybe then my legs would be beautiful. In museums we see defaced torsos on pedestals. My secret: I am made of the stolen parts, the long lost arms and breasts and heads all piled together, like so much careless rubble. From eleven to seventeen I filled journals with monstrous sketches of my body parts, drawn opposite lists of the demanding physical routines I would need to reinvent myself.

All is not lost. After extensive investigation, I have discovered that only my thumbs are perfect. Smooth, slender, lovely veins taper in at the joint before white moons flare out from the base. Poor, washed-out divas. Years ago, when I was thin enough to dance, they played their last starring role: folded in my palm, seductiveness concealed for recitals. In Renaissance France, home of ballet’s fruitful adolescence, both thumbs and ankles were scandalous. I understand. My thumbs are sexy, the sexiest part of me. If left alone, I’d gawk for hours.

Dysmorphia is less of an illness and more of a lifestyle. Riding my bike through campus I am prone to crashes caused by my shameless staring at all these gorgeous, laughing young people. The plurality of beauty overwhelms me. I desperately seek one physical standard, one

moral truth, but instead I'm surrounded by the bright and the delicate, the stately and the jubilant, the slender and the voluptuous, as if no one has the decency to make up their mind, to finally whisper the sacred ideal in my eager ear. Sure, covered in clothes and without much introspection, I slip in and out of the social world with the body only as a vessel, a vessel that neither propels nor impedes my motion. But then I pass one mirror and suddenly I am a collage of mismatched pieces and I fall.