

# Censorship and The Female Body

*This essay was written in response to my insatgram account being removed. It was first published in [Oyster](#) and [The Huffington Post](#).*

I wasn't shocked at the reaction I received from my t-shirt. I'm used to being told by society that I must regulate my body to fit the norm. I'm used to the fact that images of unaltered women are seen as unacceptable. I've taught myself to ignore it (as much as I can) and through the Internet (via sites like ROOKIE) and social media platforms (like Instagram and Facebook) I've been able to freely share images and start discussions about these issues. Recently I had my Instagram account deleted. I did nothing that violated the terms of use. No nudity, violence, pornography, unlawful, hateful, or infringing imagery. What I did have was an image of MY body that didn't meet society's standard of "femininity". The image I posted was from the waist down wearing a bathing suit bottom in front of a sparkly backdrop. Unlike the 5,883,628 (this is how many images are tagged #bikini) bathing suit images on Instagram (see [here](#) and [here](#)) mine depicted my own unaltered state – an unshaven bikini line. Up until this moment I had obviously seen and felt the pressure to regulate my body but never thought I would literally experience it.



I'm used to seeing female bodies perfected and aspects concealed in the media (i.e. in hair removal ads for women hair is NEVER shown). I wasn't surprised when TMZ requested to interview me about my t-shirt but then cancelled because the image was "too explicit for television" – whereas during Rihanna's abuse scandal her beaten up face was broadcasted hundreds of times. I'm used to seeing women being degraded, slut shamed, harassed for what they look like. Even the most powerful women in the world are measured by their appearance and constantly ridiculed for it. I'm used to one of the biggest media outlets calling a 9-year old girl a "cunt" (with the intention of being "satirical"). I'm used to hearing the top played songs on the radio tell me "I know you want it – just let me liberate you", "You don't know you're beautiful, that's what makes you beautiful", "Put molly all in her champagne/ She ain't even know it / I took her home and I enjoyed that/ She ain't even know it". I'm used to seeing blockbuster movies get a rating of NC-17 because a woman is shown receiving pleasure -while movies that feature men receiving pleasure get ratings as low as PG.

I'm used to seeing cover after cover featuring stories about a popular celebrity being fat-shamed during pregnancy. I'm used to seeing reviews of an award show performance that critiques a female singer for being "slutty" but then fails to even mention the older male behind her. I'm used to reading articles about whole towns harassing a rape victim until she's forced to leave. I don't want to be used to this. I don't want to have to see the same thing constantly. I don't want to be desensitized to what's happening around me all.the.time. I consider myself endlessly lucky to have access to the Internet and technology. Through it I've found myself and have been able to join a new discourse of females young and old who strive to change the way we look and treat ourselves. I know having a social media profile removed is a 21st century privileged problem – but it is the way a lot of us live. These profiles mimic our physical selves and a lot of the time are even more important. They are ways to connect with an audience, to start discussion, and to create change. Through this removal I really felt how strong of a distrust and hate we have towards female bodies. The deletion of my account felt like a physical act, like the public coming at me with a razor, sticking their finger down my throat, forcing me to cover up, forcing me to succumb to societies image of beauty. That these very real pressures we face everyday can turn into literal censorship.

If the Internet mimics real life then there is no doubt that real life can mimic it. That if we allow ourselves to be silenced or censored it can happen in real life too. That if an online society of people can censor your body what stops them from doing so in real life. This is already happening, you experience this everyday. When someone catcalls at you, yells "SLUT", comments on all your Facebook photos calling you "disgusting", tries to physically violate you, spreads private nude images of you to a mass amount of people via text, calls you ugly, tells you to change your body, tells you are not perfect, this cannot continue to be our reality. To all the young girls and women, do not let this discourage you, do not let anyone tell you what you should look like, tell you how to be, tell you that you do not own your body. Even if society tries to silence you keep on going, keep moving forward, keep creating revolutionary work, and keep this discourse alive. To those who reported me, to those who are disgusted by my body, to those who commented "horrible" or "disgusting" on an image of ME, I want you to thoughtfully dissect your own reaction to these things, please think about WHY you felt this way, WHY this image was so shocking, WHY you have no tolerance for it. Hopefully you will come to understand that it might not be you thinking these things but society telling you how to think.

Petra Collins, 2013