

The Hidden Truth of Fitspiration and Disordered Eating Amongst Women in the US

By Julia Rabbitt



Background

Fitspiration is a platform on Instagram where influencers encourage users to engage in “healthy eating” and “healthy living.” However, it contains many hidden messages that depict beauty as pain and suffering through a restrictive diet and strict exercise regimen.

There are multiple kinds of eating disorders: anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge eating disorder, which effect about 30 million people in the United States. A new eating disorder is arising: *orthorexia*, which is an “obsessive and extreme focus on ‘pure’ or ‘clean’ eating.” Many influencers advocate for this through the use of restrictive diets such as Keto, Whole30, Vegan, Low Carb.

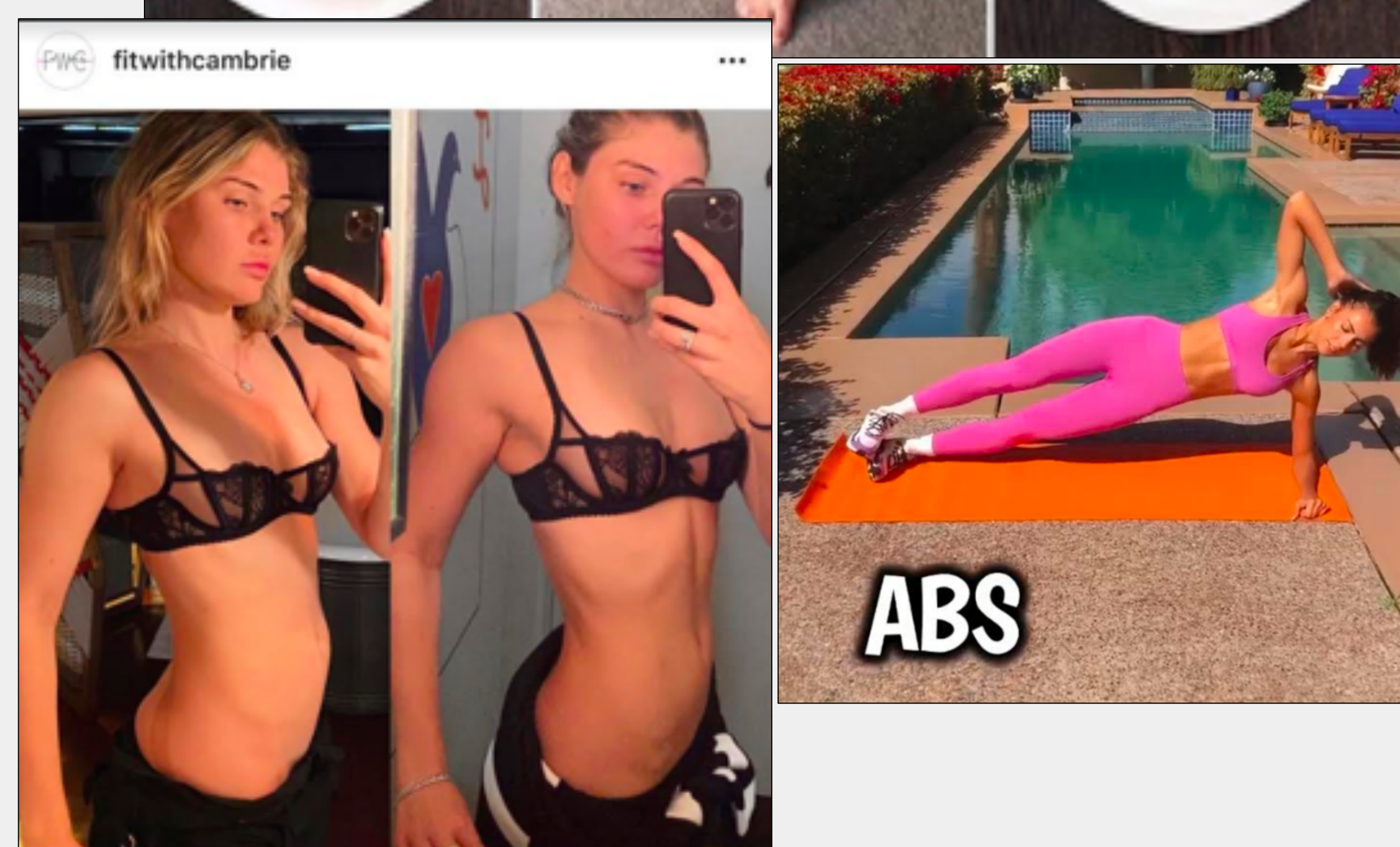
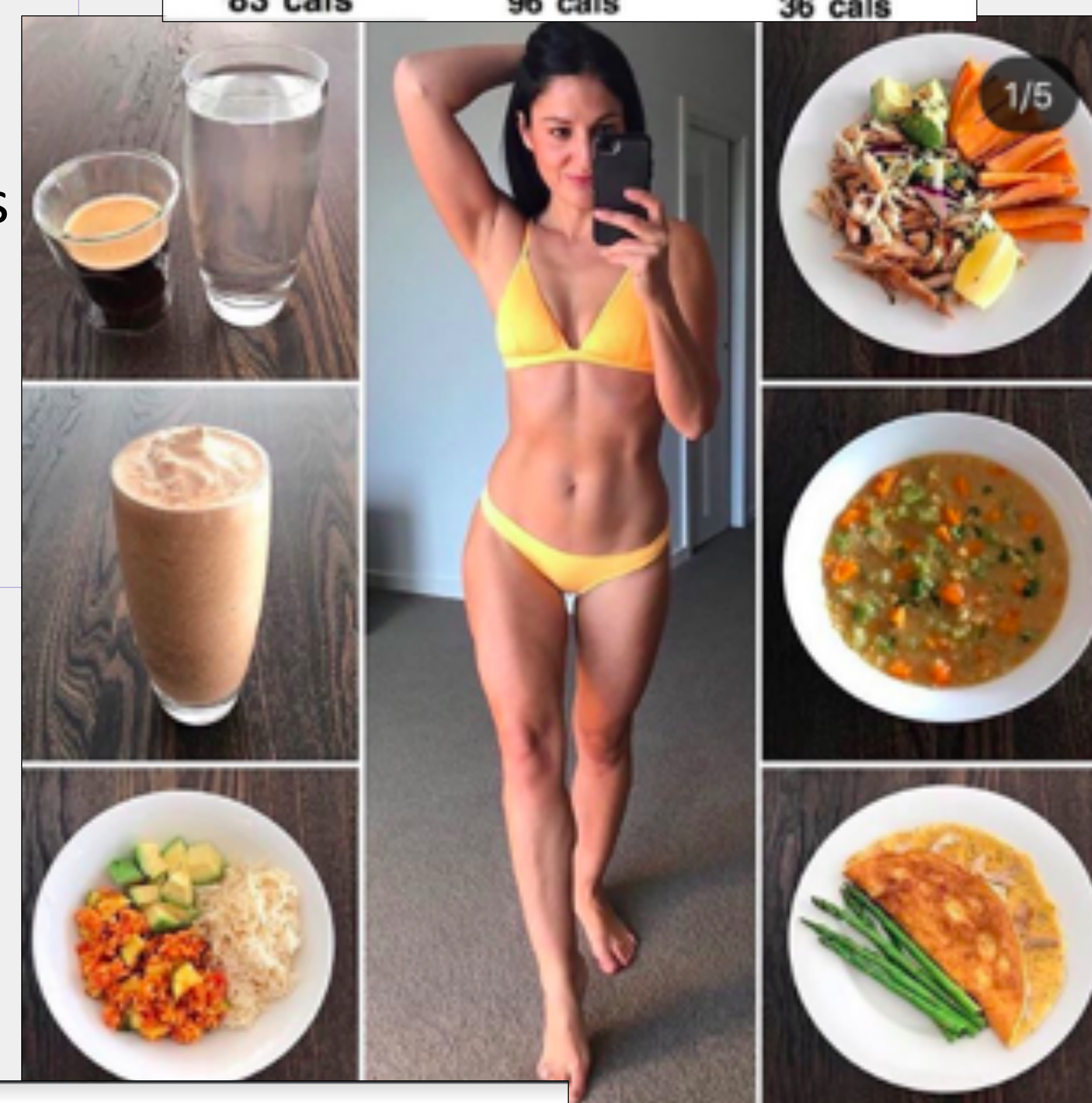
US News, “Eating Disorder Statistics”

Our Beauty Ideal

Today, our body ideal is the “athletic lean” or the “healthy skinny” (YouTube, “Women’s Ideal Body Types Throughout History”). This features a woman with a low body fat percentage and big breasts, a thigh gap, and a flat stomach.

“Beauty is pain” was described Simon Richter as one of the earliest depictions of raw human emotion. However, Richter distinguishes between beauty is pain and not suffering. Today Instagram advocates for beauty through suffering by sponsoring restrictive diets, strict exercise regimens, waist trainers, skinny teas, etc. all to achieve the “athletic lean” and in the broad sense “beauty” and “acceptance

References: YouTube “Women’s Ideal Body Types Throughout History,” U.S News, Simon Richter / Suzannah Biernoff, Luke O’Neill, A. Stewart Truswell, Johanna T Dwyer, Jacob J. Feldman, and Jean Mayer.



History of Dieting

Weight has played a role in females social interactions with males and other females; if a females weight is considered excessive, they are at a greater social disadvantage. Many women engage in dieting as a result even though many diets have no scientific backing. Diets such as Atkins, Beverly Hills, Pritikin, etc. lead to adverse health impacts and are not sustainable, causing a vicious cycle of weight fluctuations and frustration among women.

Methods to My Survey

I conducted a survey for 100 college age females aged between 20-22 from universities across the US. I asked questions regarding body image after exposure to images displayed to the left. Nearly every girl said Instagram negatively impacted their body image from a range of mild to severe. Here were some of the quotes I found:

Results and Conclusions

“I need to lose weight. I am not thin enough.” “I feel it has so intensely negatively impacted me. I see so many perfect girls and I can’t help but compare myself.”

This ties into the study performed by Deisher and Mills in 1963 on high school seniors. 50% of the girls expressed concerns of being overweight and too fat. 80% of girls wanted to weight less than they did, and over 60% of girls had engaged in dieting by the time they were seniors in high school. Being exposed to Instagram, girls are exposed to model type figures and ideals. As girls are going through bodily changes in puberty, many have a strong urge to conform: thus to beauty ideals.

