



The World Has Curves: The Global Quest for the Perfect Body

By Julia Savacool

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American women today are faced with a paradox: They uphold an ideal of beauty--long, lean, toned--that increasingly bears little resemblance to truth about their size. Women around the world are spending more time, money, and energy pursuing this ideal than ever before. So why does the "perfect body" remain so elusive? And why does the definition of "ideal" vary so widely between countries and cultures?

The World Has Curves is journalist Julia Savacool's attempt to answer these questions. She takes readers on a world tour--from China, where the plastic surgery industry is booming; to South Africa, where a heavier shape signals health in a country ravaged by disease; to Afghanistan, where the burka once again reigns supreme. Through extensive reporting and intimate interviews, she offers readers an understanding of how body ideals--in America and abroad--have come to be inextricably linked to the economics of a culture and the impact of globalization. From news programs to reality shows, from prime time comedy to national advertising campaigns, the topic of women's bodies and our collective judgment of the perfect shape is ever-present. This engaging narrative is newsworthy and provocative and will advance our cultural conversation.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

JULIA SAVACOOL is the articles director for *Fitness* magazine and has previously held editorial positions at *Marie Claire*, *Good Housekeeping*, and *Self*. Her award-winning stories and articles have appeared in the *New York Times*, *Redbook*, *Glamour*, and many other publications. She lives in New York City.

From The Washington Post

From The Washington Post's Book World/washingtonpost.com Reviewed by Lisa Bonos

bonosl@washpost.com When journalist Julia Savacool asked women from around the world to describe their ideal body, diverging portraits emerged -- from a curvy, Coca-Cola bottle silhouette in Jamaica to a linear, kimono shape in Japan. But universally, she found, women's bodies are economic and social indicators. Physiques have different meanings depending on the cultural backdrop: While thinness typically signals wealth in overweight America, it's synonymous with sickness and poverty in AIDS-ravaged South Africa. And Western physical "ideals" are constantly being exported by way of beauty products and the images of slim American TV stars. For example, as China's trade policies have loosened in the past few decades, strict communist dress codes have given way to a culture in which cosmetic surgery is one of the fastest-growing industries. Some of the sharpest cultural snapshots come to life when Savacool steps aside and lets her sources speak in short monologues. We meet a naturally thin Jamaican woman who chugs large amounts of milk daily in pursuit of a rounder bottom and an Afghan woman who describes the burqa as "culturally comfortable, a feeling of safety in an unsafe country." The American "paradox" -- we keep getting fatter despite our desire to be thin -- is not a new plot line. Savacool pushes the domestic conversation forward by asking how the U.S. recession might affect our waistlines. But her conclusion that tomorrow's ideal will ultimately prize fitness over thinness seems stale. Surely, that obsession with fitness has already arrived.

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Users Review

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