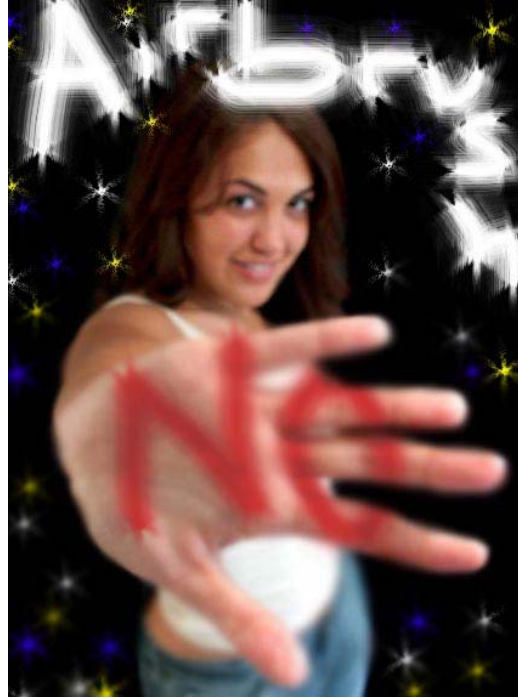


No, I'm Not Airbrushed By Lauren J. Rivera

Somewhere between page thirty-five and thirty-six of the Victoria's Secret 2005 Swim Suit catalogue, I looked down at my size ten legs and hips and came to the realization that a thin layer of ice would spread over hell before I ever became a serious print model. The women on the pages before me were so flawlessly skinned, proportionally thin and curved, and so perfectly tanned that I wonder what nude beach they are all hanging out at because they have not one tan line. And it can't be a tanning bed tan because I've done that, and I came out looking like a carrot. The close-ups show full, sensuous lips and skin that stretches without a line, without a freckle, without any damn flaw of life! Do they sit pampered and pretty all day? I thought models live the Rock Star life and party until the wee hours of dawn, so *where* are their dark eye circles and bags? Are they a part of some elite few who are blessed with the knowledge of abundant beauty? Who gave them the right to be so glamorous? Okay, so I have a little gripe, but it's nothing I need to see a psychologist for...right?



On my way to my photographer's studio last week I had these and many other questions testing my sanity. It would be my third photo shoot and I had yet to actually *do* anything with the photos. It's not that I having a dying wish to walk the catwalk while photographers of famous fashion magazines point and shoot at me. Please! I'd tumble with the first step on my Manolos (foot to high heel coordination does not come natural to me). But, I do believe that there is some truth in people telling me that I'm photogenic. Furthermore, I believe that being photogenic also makes you video camera-genic, and in front of a video camera is my ultimate destination. I want to act, badly, and I feel like this whole taking pictures thing and getting recognized is a starting point. But once you start where do you go? And can my look even get me there?

As I setup in the studio, I think back to the models, their facial expressions, their stances and begin to mimic them. But something is telling me it's not right. When I pout my lips I over do it. When I try to suck my chubby cheeks in it looks like I'm sucking on a sour lemon. If I attempt at a "far off look" I come up with something menacing instead. I try for sexy and get sloppy. I ask my photographer "how it is that there are humans on this earth who were made from absolute perfection?" "It's not perfection, it's Photoshop and airbrushing," he said. He then added, "Lauren, stop trying so hard and just be

yourself." I'm not sure me is good enough, but I try anyway because the poor guy has put up with me for two years and still calls me for photo shoots.

Later he shows me before and after airbrushed pictures of popular models. It's an amazing transformation. Granted the top models are paper thin but that does not mean they are free of flaws. It turns out many have blemishes, pimples, wrinkles and, (*gasp!*) even cellulite. However, after a few alterations on any photo program they are gone, *voila!* All that remains are these picture perfect people who put us "normal" women to shame. There have actually been psychological studies done which prove that after only a few minutes of looking at models in fashion magazines, the average woman becomes depressed about her own body and loses self-esteem. We begin to pinch or loveable *chichos* or curse at our badunkadunk booties. Such photos of these nearly unattainable figures have created such an alarming increase in eating disorders and yet the trend of size zero and below models is all I ever remember seeing. Will it ever end? Will I ever see a model who is the average size of ten or twelve and her *not* be considered a plus size model? I contemplated these questions into the next week when I received the outcome of my photo session.

There were two CDs filled with pictures. "There were so many good ones, I just sent them all," said my photographer. And, it's hard to admit but he was right. There were pictures where I let loose while dancing to JLo's "Get Right". Pictures of me with a thinking face and not because I was posing, but because he caught me...when I was thinking (go figure!). Here and there I cracked a smile and the wrinkles it made weren't ugly, they just showed I was real. My skin was glowing and not because I was airbrushed. The bags under my eyes weren't bad after all, they gave me character. Sun freckles spotted their way across my cheeks, but each one brought definition. That set of pictures where I wore little makeup and released myself from the pressure of thinking I had to be something I'm not were the perfect example of what I am...beautiful. And I don't need a model on page two of Victoria Secret to tell me that.