

COVER STORY

Starving for perfection

by Cassie Berta

Body image: the subjective and often distorted view of one's body upon which the media, the fashion industry, and the detrimental mental illnesses pray. The perception of one's body is of varying importance to different people: some spend innumerable hours and dollars in pursuit of altering their body, some have subtle dissatisfactions they deemed unimportant to change, and some believe physical appearance and body image is too trivial to think much of. Regardless of this spectrum, there is an obvious epidemic affecting a wide range of Americans across all ages, genders, and ethnicities.

There is an unalterable ideal of beauty perpetuated among the mediums on which most children and teens spend a majority of their time: Instagram, Twitter, Tumblr, Snapchat, even apps by celebrities with tips on how to achieve their signature look. These outlets show you picture after picture of flawless, beautiful girls wearing hundreds of dollars worth of make up, chiseled, athletic men, and disproportionate women with 22 inch waists and butts large and perky enough to hold champagne glasses. These are the only bodies societally deemed "attractive," and it doesn't help that most fashion models are thinner than 98% of American women (Smolak L. 1996). These harmful, unrealistic expectations manifest themselves in multiple toxic ways.

These standards give a not only unrealistic expectation on one's own body image, but provide a disturbingly narrow window for the body type people should be attracted to. Young boys are force-fed visuals of cellulite-free, large-chested women, while girls are conditioned to drool over 6'0" Calvin Klein models with a dazzling set of abdominal muscles. This idea of only these specific body types being worthy

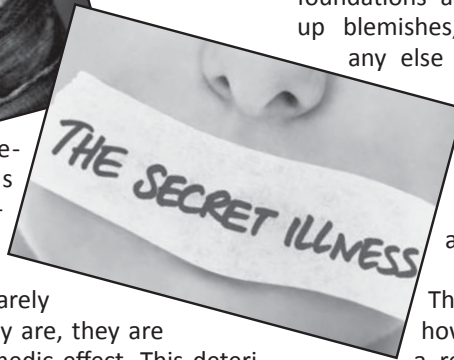
of love and attraction is extraordinarily dangerous. It makes people who don't fit into this slim box of "worthiness" feel as though they don't deserve love, or a loving relationship. We are bombarded with image after image of relationships involving super thin women who can be physically swept off their feet by a muscular, tall man.

Relationships involving people of different or larger sizes are rarely seen, or if they are, they are meant for comedic effect. This deteriorates the self-worth of the larger boys and girls who now believe they can't be romantically loved or be seen as attractive because of their weight. As a teenager or younger person, when forming relationships is hard enough, this is especially harmful for one's social development and self-image.

Aside from the media, there are entire industries which thrive off of people's desire to have "the perfect body." Women young and old are marketed spanx and shapewear, usually placed next to the underwear

and bras to give the impression they are a necessary layer to the women's ensemble. Men are offered flex belts and other abdominal-enhancing devices and skin-tight muscle shirts to show them off. Padded butt-enhancers and push up bras give women the impression that they need to have the curves of a size 12 while staying slim everywhere else. The makeup industry prospers off people's "imperfections," offering skin care and thousands of foundations and concealers to cover up blemishes, birthmarks, freckles--any else which makes someone unique. Contouring has become a popular way to slim the face, creating a more chiseled look made popular by apps like Instagram.

Throughout all of this, however, there has been a recent reclaiming of the curvy body type.



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With mega-stars like Kim Kardashian, Beyonce, Kat Dennings, Sophia Vergara, and Nicki Minaj celebrating their curves, comes a slightly wider range of acceptance of larger women and girls. Girls are praised for their “thickness” and curvy bodies. However, this has also seemed to create another level of expectations: girls must have huge breasts, but a flat stomach; they must have a large butt, but without the cellulite. These contradictory pressures are the cause of self-objectification, negative self image, poor mental health and, most devastatingly, eating disorders.

With all of the unrealistic expectations, societal and peer pressure, and forced negative self-image, it’s no shock anorexia is the third most common chron-

ic illness among adolescents (ndsu.edu, 2002). It isn’t a shock eating disorders affect about 30 million Americans of all ages and genders, but the statistics for younger people are much more appalling.

81% of 10 year olds are afraid of being fat, and 51% of 9-10 year old girls feel better about themselves if they are on a diet (Mellin LM, Irwin CE & Scully S 1992).

Time Magazine reports 80% of all children have been on a diet before fourth grade.

Almost 20% of boys said they were “extremely” concerned about their weight (JAMA Ped. 2014)

95% of those who have eating disorders are between the ages of 12 and 25

11% of high school students have been diagnosed with an eating disorder (ANAD)

One thing is certain: The worth of a human being is not defined by the numbers used to measure oneself. No one can wrap a measuring tape around an open mind or a random act of kindness. Those who care about you will not care about the size of your thighs or the fat in your stomach; they will care about the goodness in your heart and the essence of your spirit. It is up to us to stand up for ourselves and to help those who cannot. What you look like does not dictate who you are. We are so much more than meets the eye.

Eating Disorder Awareness Month

by Hannah Humes

February, in addition to being the month of love, is also Eating Disorder Awareness Month. Every 62 minutes someone dies as a direct result of an eating disorder. Women ages 15-24 are twelve times more likely to die from anorexia than from any other illness. While the large increase in diagnoses may come from more awareness on the doctor’s end, much of these eating disorders come from the mainstream media. With things like the Victoria’s Secret Fashion Show, fitness stars’ Instagrams, and an unhealthy obsession with reporting which celebrity looks the best for their age, it is no wonder that people of all ages feel pressure to maintain a perfect body. The sad reality of society is now that 81 percent of ten-year-olds are “sometimes” to “very often” on diets to control their weight.

Students at the high school are some of the most susceptible people to eating disorders, and the pressure of looking perfect surmounts everyday. In these days, students spend countless hours online, looking at websites of how to get a better body, and how who they

currently are is not enough.

While many people suffer from eating disorders, they are almost written off as a figment of the imagination until the problem gets seriously out of control. Eating disorders are typically a mental disorder that involves body image and negative connotations surrounding food. While there are many types of eating disorders, they all stem from an unhealthy relationship with food, seeing food not as a source of energy, but rather the enemy. The Eating Disorder Awareness Month seeks to educate people about how these diseases can negatively affect one’s life and also how these disorders are not under the control of the person who suffers from them.

Another important issue to bring awareness to is the prevalence of eating disorders and body image issues males can have. Men are almost always overlooked when this

topic is brought up, with many people dismissing the issue as entirely female. However, out of the 30 million people in the US that suffer from eating disorders, 10 million of those are male. In addition, many men can obtain body image issues due to the desired muscular, tall physique that is perpetuated through the media.

The subject of eating disorders has always been a difficult one to talk about, but this month of awareness is about having the difficult conversations. It is important to remember that these situations might appear bleak and seem like never-ending issues, but these problems are able to be helped with the contributions of society.



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