

THE BODY IMAGE PROJECT



In this issue, we explore body image. Our cover photos were inspired by a recent internet trend. Photographer Ileana Perez took pictures in the hall of random people and then a second shot of them immediately after they were told they were beautiful or photogenic.



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STARVING FOR ACCEPTANCE

Staffer describes her struggles with eating disorder

It took me a long time to realize that I could only find satisfaction in myself. Others will always find something negative to harp on, especially when it comes to the way people look. It does not require much looking beneath the surface at who someone really is.

Growing up, recess was my daily nightmare. While playing on the playground, the boys I had childish crushes on and girls I considered my friends called me fat. I carried sweaters around constantly to cover up every inch of myself, even just to walk across the classroom. I never ran around with the other kids. I became aware of my every movement. I felt insecure of myself to the point that the farther away I was away from everyone else's eyes the better.

My family placed intense pressure on me, especially my mother. Her health kicks and passion for exercise only made me wish to lose weight more. She would take my siblings and I to exercise with her at the gym, but I felt embarrassed and ashamed of myself. When I ran, I would break down and begin to cry due to my anxiety towards exercising in front of others. However, I still felt the need to impress her and the rest of my family by becoming thin. When I compared myself to my other siblings who were much more athletic and in shape than I was, I felt inadequate and like I needed to change in order to gain my family's acceptance.

When I entered middle school, my insecurities only became worse. With more exposure to the Internet, I would come across pictures of beautiful and thin girls, only making me more self-conscious. Other students continued to call me names at school: fat, gross,

and annoying. It only deepened the hatred of my body and myself.

I restricted my meals until they became almost obsolete. I went the entire school day without eating and only ate a small dinner in the evening.

The idea of eating repulsed me, and sometimes when I would eat I would force myself to throw it back up. Eating only gave me anxiety, my fear of weight gain and need for weight loss took

over. I remember eating and instantly regretting it, rushing to the bathroom to alleviate the weight in my stomach. On top of that, I began to exercise daily in effort to speed up my weight loss.

I shed 50 pounds in three months. I became weak and even felt faint throughout the school day. Sometimes while walking down the hall I would think that doors were opening in front of me when nothing was there, causing me to flinch. Even though weight was coming off, I was miserable and did not love my body any more than before.

Those around me began to notice my weight loss, but I never felt satisfied with my changes. I still saw fat on my body, so I still had more weight to lose.

My friends went from calling me fat to calling me anorexic. Rumors spread throughout school about my quick weight loss. Even though they were true, it still hurt to hear it out loud, and from the people I thought cared about me. Even after losing weight, people still weren't satisfied with the way I looked and only made me feel bad. I felt exasperated. How could I make people happy with the

way I looked? Nothing I was doing seemed to work.

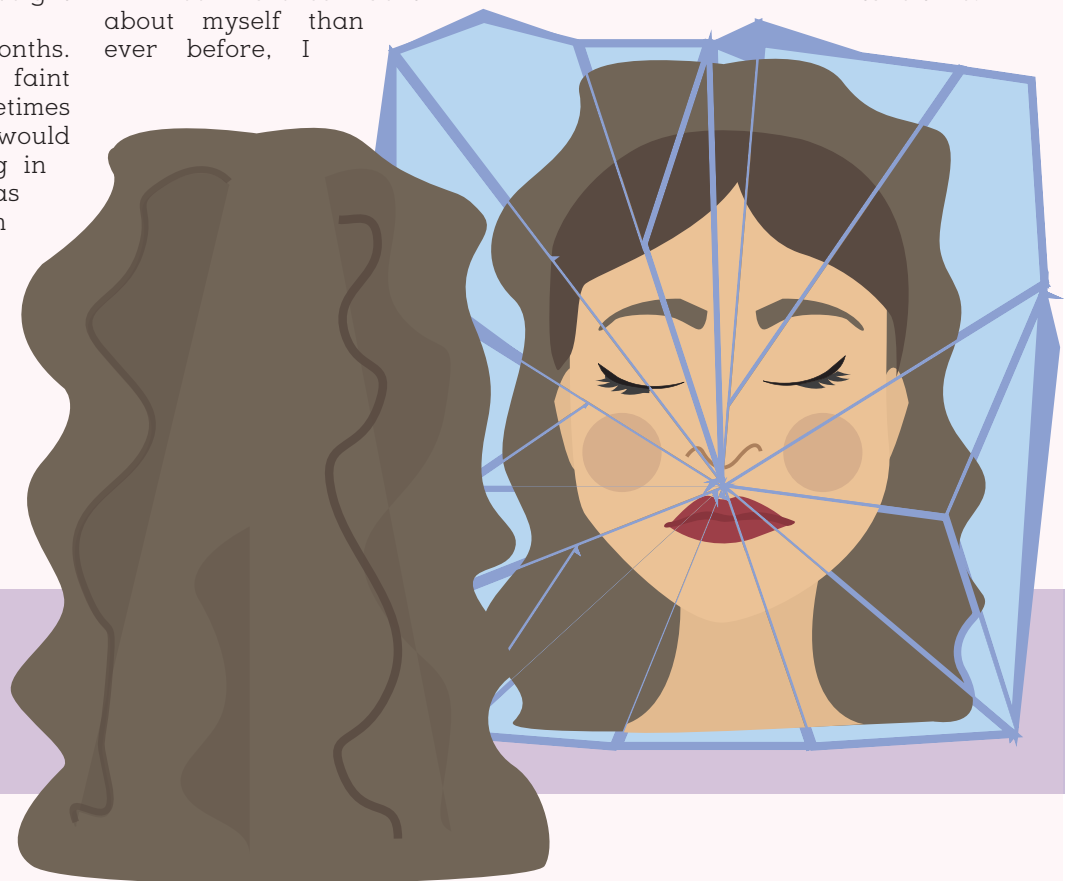
After about six months I began to incorporate more food into my diet, my stomach had to adjust to the new intake of food and it took a while. Sometimes eating meals would result in painful stomachaches, which sometimes made progress difficult. But eventually I ate two meals a day, and then three, and even the occasional snack.

My focus shifted from losing weight to becoming a healthy weight and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. I changed my diet and exercised daily. I began to like my body more and more. However, this process did not happen overnight, only after a couple of years did I get to a stable weight and eating schedule, but I am still a work in progress.

I feel more confident about myself than ever before, I

run every other day, eat healthy, and feel at peace with my body most of the time. Some days my self-consciousness comes back and it feels too easy to relapse and fall back into my old habits, but I know insecurity just happens as a part of daily life and I do not allow my negative feelings to get the better of me. I feel comfortable enough with my own body now and know the importance of loving yourself without needing the approval of others.

I wish I could visit my eighth grade self and tell her what I was doing did not benefit me physically or mentally, and that I was beautiful just the way I was. The mean things my friends said only meant they were not my real friends, and one day I would find people who lift me up instead of tear me down, it would only take time.



THE BODY IMAGE PROJECT

Teens discuss views on themselves, beauty

Notes from the editor

Kylie Ruffino Co-Editor

Originally, the Body Image Project came from the idea that teenagers suffer from issues with their bodies and their appearances. But what came out of the interview process seems so much more. My reactions to interviewing people astonished me. People I see as beautiful stood before me discussing their very real perceptions of themselves. I wanted to hug them and tell them they are amazing, but when I took a step back I realized I say the same things about myself. I have my own insecurities and I wondered if people would be as shocked to hear mine as I was to hear theirs.

Then, a whole other group of people astonished me. Throughout their interview they established a sense of confidence and defied the common perception of beauty. In a way they inspired me to own my own body and self-confidence.

Everyone grows up with different physical features; some link them to cultures or races; some set them apart or help them fit in. Beauty and physical appearance are intertwined. The point is this: everyone has a story to tell about their bodies whether they are positive, or they are negative. This project intends to find links and opinions in relation to one's self and one's idea of beauty.

Most of the people I interviewed discussed the fact talking about their dislikes came up easier than talking about their likes, even though almost everyone define beauty similarly; beauty is being comfortable with yourself, beauty is being happy, or beauty is different on everyone. So why is it still more prevalent to think and talk about the bad? While one wants to believe these qualities make up true beauty, society makes it hard to constantly put those ideas in to action.

I also heard people talking about how society created this image of beauty based on European features, which made many colored or cultured people feel bad about their qualities. However, these same people seemed to have an overall positive outlook on themselves. Because they looked different than what was in social media, they didn't look up to it. They discovered what made them happy about themselves.

The overall conclusion I continued to draw interview after interview was that social media and society created an image, which many people don't conform to. This results in self-conscious behaviors and comparing one's self to others. It's not that we should all ignore pop culture, but we should strive to redefine beauty farther than in our heads. We can all find beauty in ourselves.

Kylie Ruffino

CHRISTINA BUI, 12



What is your perception of beauty?

My perception of beauty is socially constructed and always in the hands of western European standards. It is very exclusive to minority groups and that took me a really long time to realize, but is something I've internalized now

Is it easier to talk about likes or dislikes?

I feel like they were both equally easy to answer because I feel like self confidence was something I struggled a lot with until junior year and then the summer before senior year it really hit me like a train. And I feel like it was because of the saying "fake it 'til you make it." It is easy to think of flaws, but they are something that is on me but doesn't define me and the things about me I do like are something for me to appreciate when I am having a bad day.

Do you have a specific moment?

For the longest time I felt like society told me that if I wasn't this body type or have this face shape I wasn't pretty. Now, I don't know if I am talking to the right people or what, but I feel like society is becoming more open to non-western types of beauty. There is not just one type of beautiful.

BROOKE ELLIOT, 12



What do you dislike about yourself physically?

Physically I try not to dislike myself but it always creeps in about my body shape and body size

What do you like about yourself physically?

Well... I don't know exactly what I like about myself. As far as myself goes I tend to focus more on the negative and comparing myself to others.

How does society make you feel?

It really can make me feel bad about myself. Nobody ever out tells me that I'm not beautiful, but society is more about what is not said than what is.

SADAF NAIMZADA, 11



What do you like about yourself physically?

I like my dimples - I love my dimples and I'm proud of them. I have culture behind me and I feel like it is portrayed in my features and I'm really really proud of that.

Is it easier to talk about likes or dislikes?

I think the likes actually popped up faster. Society today is so harsh and you always hear the negative stuff, but I have been surrounded by positive people in my life that told me not to look at society just look at yourself and be happy.

Do you have a specific moment?

A specific moment I didn't feel beautiful kind of mixes with a time I did. I went to the graduation party of one of my friends and I felt so beautiful in my dress and my make-up. I felt all pretty. When I went there I still felt super beautiful, but when I saw the pictures I did not look too good in that dress, so I felt bad about wearing that dress.

BRIAN BAKER, 11



Is it easier to talk about likes or dislikes?

What I dislike about myself. Because in this sort of society, self-esteem is definitely a major issue and I think from an early age we are looking at all these perceptions of what we want to be or what we think we have to be. And then we go back and look at ourselves and we compare ourselves to others. We think about it a lot more than anything positive.

Do you think you are beautiful?

I wouldn't particularly say I was beautiful. From a pretty early age I've found myself not to be beautiful so I've tried to make myself more interesting than beautiful through clothing choices.

Is it hard for you to talk about beauty?

Yes it is because I don't really think about being beautiful a lot.

Take part in Put-Up Challenge

Encouraged by the idea of improving overall body image within the realm of the teenage world, actively participate in this challenge to boost peoples confidence and self-appreciation.

Rules

1. If someone nearby insults themselves, make them give two put-ups.
2. Try to get them to say one physical put up and one about their personality That way, they are boosting their body image, but also their overall perception of themselves.
3. Don't let them back out, no matter what.
4. Encourage them to start doing the challenge with other people.



MarQuise Prince-Salone Co-Editor

Junior relays life with facial scar

Eight year-old Ebony Spears strolls though a supermarket alongside her mother. They reach the checkout, and a woman nearby asks about a unique feature concerning Spears; a scar that stretched across her forehead. She then states it's a shame for Spears to live with something so "horrificing and unnatural." Confused and a bit angry, she wonders why an adult would talk to a child in such a way. Her mother, nonetheless, tells her to pay no mind to people with mind sets like hers, she was still beautiful.

Junior Ebony Spears has a unique facial scar covering the majority of her forehead. She received the scar after a procedure done to remove a birthmark that was thought to be a tumor when she was three days old.

"After the doctors realized it wasn't a tumor I had to get a skin graft," Spears said. "Considering how young I was they couldn't get every spot. So as I got older my skin couldn't really "stretch" to grow as it normally should."

A skin graft is a surgical procedure where skin is taken from one part of the body and applied to another area. For Spears, skin was taken from her arms and legs.

Growing up with the scar made social experiences uncomfortable. In public Spears was stared at, mainly by adults. She'd grown to become self-conscious of her scar and dislike the way she looked.

"When I was younger, I didn't really have many friends," Spears said. "The other kids just saw me as that girl with the thing on her forehead. It would make me feel like I wasn't good enough so often times I was very angry and depressed because of it. I felt like the kids my age would be more accepting [of me] if I looked more like them instead of having something so obvious that set me apart from them. [Without the scar] I thought I would have more friends."

Story continues on next page

BEAUTY IN DISGUISE

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Without friends, Spears was left to entertain herself. She often read, played with her pets or watched TV.

Although Spears was battling with internal problems, she kept it all to herself and dealt with the situation as best she could. Spears kept her insecurity to herself mainly due to the fact that she felt like she didn't need any help but once she found out that other people were like her, Spears started feeling a bit more confident in her skin.

"It was like a sense of relief knowing that other people understood some of the things that I went through," Spears said. "They taught me how to accept myself and how to be comfortable around others that didn't understand what I went through."

With her newfound confidence, Spears' has bittersweet feelings towards her scar. Sweet because she's finally comfortable with who she is but bitter because her family members often

try to pressure her into having another surgery in order to smoothen out the scar.

"I'm not sure why they want me to change," Spears said. "I guess you could say since its taken me so long to have some sort of confidence and self-esteem with the way I look. I wouldn't feel like myself if I made such a huge change now."

Spears believes the scar doesn't necessarily reflect who she is. It makes her stand out more than others in a physical sense, but the scar just means she's her own person. Spears has grown with and become comfortable with it.

"There are many people who struggle with the way they look," Spears said. "Coming from personal experience once I realized while others may see my scar as a huge flaw I see it as the one part of me that makes me beautiful. [We] shouldn't let other's negative opinion affect how they feel about ourselves, we should be comfortable in our own skin no matter what."

Teen describes influx of new attention



Sitting in class, most students would complain about the pains of assignments, but for junior Daniela Coreno, the pain resides with the throbbing emanating from her swollen feet and aching back. For the past 8 months, Coreno has observed her belly growing to compensate for the life she's creating, attracting attention, both good and bad.

As the hallways fill with students, Coreno absorbs the stares of onlookers walking past her, all eyes glued to her belly.

"It feels pretty awkward," Coreno said. "People just stare at me, I feel like they're talking bad about me. They get disappointed because they think being pregnant is a bad thing, that I'm a bad influence."

Despite the unwanted attention her belly brings, Coreno can't help but love her baby bump. She and her family are excited to meet her baby in December. Coreno is most delighted by the ideal size of her belly, not too big nor too small, a flawless halo continuing to form in her torso.

"Nothing bothers me anymore, because I'm happy with the person I'm going to bring into the world," Coreno said. "The only thing that matters now is the baby and what I want her to be; healthy and to live a good life. I'm going to tell her that no matter what other people say and think, she should ignore the bad and just make herself happy."



Deaton relays her life with Waardenburg Syndrome

Alex Fulton Asst. Editor

It's the first day of seventh grade and Emma Deaton is participating in a first day icebreaker.

A classmate notices her unique eyes and says, "My dog has eyes just like yours!"

Awkward silence surrounds the two, as Deaton feels slightly offended by the strange comment. The girl tries

to relate to Deaton, which intimidates her.

"I think the realization of acceptance came when I was in fifth grade. I was like you know what I'm not going to be ashamed of myself, I'm just going to love myself. It may sound really cheesy, but that's what happened."

The student experiences a wave of embarrassment when she finds out that she may have just offended one of her classmates.

Back when Deaton was six weeks old a single brown eye developed, resulting in two different eye colors, one brown eye and one blue eye, a case known as Waardenburg Syndrome.

"My dad has brown eyes and my mom has blue eyes, so it's kind of like a little bit of each," Deaton said.

"When we moved to Texas and I went to my new eye doctor, she asked me like three times to take out my contacts and my mom had to explain that I wasn't wearing contacts."

Deaton now carries on her life with her single clear blue eye, but she didn't always accept her syndrome. Although her symptom is known to create clear blue eyes, it is possible to create two different colored eyes.

"I think the realization of acceptance came when I was in fifth grade," Deaton said. "I was like you know what I'm not going to be ashamed of myself, I'm just going to love myself. It may sound really cheesy, but that's what happened."

Through the years Deaton has received many questions about her abnormality, but in the end Deaton shrugs off the comments.

"I've gotten negative responses, but I can't really change it, it doesn't matter to me," Deaton said. "It makes me unique in a good way, [and] I've never felt self-conscious about it."