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Reimagining My Body

Center for Public Service
Gettysburg College

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Reimagining My Body

Abstract

I stood there, shoulders slouched, elbows locked, hands glued to the side of the toilet. My body convulsing, I told myself, “this is the last time, just one more time and you’ll get back on track tomorrow.” It wasn’t the last time. I had been forcing myself to purge for months at this point, and each time I hated myself for it.

It was something I couldn’t control. It wasn’t out of a need for attention as so commonly thought, but a pure need to be the unreachable level of thin that I thought would make me beautiful. I was thirty pounds underweight and I still hated my body. There is no “good enough” when suffering with this type of illness—every pound you lose just encourages you to continue purging until you are reduced to bone and skin. [excerpt]

Keywords

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, eating disorders, anorexia, bulimia, purging, body image, self esteem, body weight, overweight, obesity

Disciplines

Behavior and Behavior Mechanisms | Cognition and Perception | Health Psychology | Medicine and Health | Public Health Education and Promotion | Social Psychology

Comments

Surge is a student blog at [Gettysburg College](http://www.gettysburg.edu) where systemic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at surgegettysburg.wordpress.com Through stories and reflection, these blog entries relate personal experiences to larger issues of equity, demonstrating that –isms are structural problems, not actions defined by individual prejudice. We intend to popularize justice, helping each other to recognize our biases and unlearn the untruths.

SURGE

[VERB] : to move suddenly or powerfully forward or upward

REIMAGINING MY BODY

December 2, 2013

I stood there, shoulders slouched, elbows locked, hands glued to the side of the toilet. My body convulsing, I told myself, “this is the last time, just one more time and you’ll get back on track tomorrow.” It wasn’t the last time. I had been forcing myself to purge for months at this point, and each time I hated myself for it.



It was something I couldn’t control. It wasn’t out of a need for attention as so commonly thought, but a pure need to be the unreachable level of thin that I thought would make me beautiful. I was thirty pounds underweight and I still hated my body. There is no “good enough” when suffering with this type of illness—every pound you lose just encourages you to continue purging until you are reduced to bone and skin.

Unfortunately, a quarter of college age women will understand that same pain that consumed my every thought four years ago. [47% of young girls in the United States want to lose weight due to media images](#). Fear of being perceived as ugly or unattractive drives half of teenage girls and one third of teenage boys as they use unhealthy weight control behaviors.

When a friend complains about “having a fat day” I feel a pang of sadness. I cringe when people joke about refusing food before formals or holiday parties because I know how quickly skipping a meal or crash dieting can rapidly spiral into something uncontrollable. When people laugh at another’s weight, thin or not, I worry that they are using fingers and toothbrushes to rid themselves of the unwanted calories of that day.

When people feel comfortable joking about [why it is better to date a girl with an eating disorder](#) or when endless ads pop up on the internet claiming to give the secrets to lose 10 pounds in a week or to cut inches upon inches from my waist I look back on my past. I think of the time I spent four hours at the gym until management suggested I leave, or when I felt nervous eating in front of my friends, fearing they would judge me for my food choices. I remember running the shower so nobody would hear me gagging in the bathroom and always wanting to tell my friends and ask for help, but being too ashamed to admit that I had a problem. I then came to the conclusion that I never want that to be my life again.

My father was the one who ultimately made me realize that I was taking my body image issues too far. He sat me down one Christmas eve after hearing me in the bathroom. That was the last time I ever forced myself to throw up. I was too thin; I felt my body deteriorating. My every thought was consumed by weight and appearance, and it needed to stop. My father was my rock and he was always very calm when I would hurt myself as a child. The concern he showed for my health made me realize that this was not like a scrape on the knee from falling off the monkey bars, but something far more serious.

Of course, these feelings don't just disappear. Negative thoughts about my body image are instilled in my mind, but I've found that they can be managed and changed into something constructive. I now focus on my body's health, not my body's weight. I found refuge in running. I want my body to be strong and powerful, and in order to do that I have to forget about the scale and focus on what my body could achieve. I am proud to say that I no longer feel the need to purge. I have accepted that life has setbacks and eating unhealthy once in a while will not be the end of me.

Most importantly I have learned what makes me feel best. I run, I hike, I stay active in every sense of the word, and I feel strong. Of course I still feel pressure to fit into the impossible mold that we have created for each other, but I remind myself of how strong my body has become. I went from being unhealthy and weak, to being a triathlete and a runner. I will probably never be entirely content with my appearance, but I am the healthiest I have ever been and I am happy. That's far more important.

There are a number of [myths related to eating disorders](#) and new studies show that, for many, the causes of eating disorders are more complex than the effects of media images, yet, for me, the fact remains that my worth was linked to being skinny. The impossible standards to which I held myself and others was dangerous. Together, we've created an unattainable standard but with determination we can work to dismantle it. My father showed me how.

Anonymous

<http://surgegettysburg.wordpress.com/2013/12/02/reimagining-my-body/>