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What My Muffin Top Has To Say To You

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What My Muffin Top Has To Say To You

Abstract

My name is Hannah, and I have a confession to make. I hate working out—none of that sweat, panting, exhaustion, and sore muscles for me, no thank you. I'm embarrassed to go to a gym because I assume that everyone judges my speed, pacing, and weight lifting. I try to encourage myself by shopping for brightly colored running shorts and funky sports bras, but, honestly, it's a fruitless endeavor. Because at the end of the day, *I just don't like to exercise.*

So why do I do it?

Because I want to be skinny. [excerpt]

Keywords

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, body image, weight, female body

Disciplines

Gender and Sexuality | Sociology | Sociology of Culture | Women's Studies

Comments

Surge is a student blog at [Gettysburg College](https://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

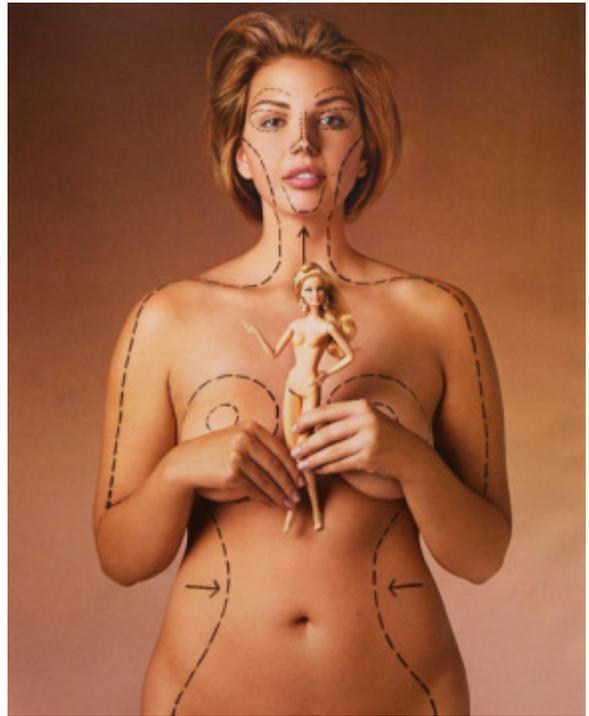
WHAT MY MUFFIN TOP HAS TO SAY TO YOU

June 11, 2013

My name is Hannah, and I have a confession to make. I hate working out—none of that sweat, panting, exhaustion, and sore muscles for me, no thank you. I'm embarrassed to go to a gym because I assume that everyone judges my speed, pacing, and weight lifting. I try to encourage myself by shopping for brightly colored running shorts and funky sports bras, but, honestly, it's a fruitless endeavor. Because at the end of the day, *I just don't like to exercise.*

So why do I do it?

Because I want to be skinny.



My name is Elle, and I have a confession to make. This year, I got fat. Well, maybe you wouldn't say that I got fat, but I got to the point where I weighed more than I ever had before and I just didn't like it. So I went on a mission to "get skinny" and reclaim the "dancer bod" I used to have. I started exercising every day, I cut desserts and fried food out of my diet, and it worked. And now I can even say that I *like* exercising, and I do – I dance, I go for runs, and I do that because I enjoy working out (endorphins, you know). But even though I lost the weight and am healthier than I've been since I started college, it's not enough. Every day I think about ab exercises and "bikini bodies" and eating fruit instead of ice cream.

Why?

Because I want to look like a model.

The thing is... neither of us is fat. But no matter how many times we tell ourselves, "You're beautiful the way you are. What's more important is that you're happy and healthy," there's still this overwhelming urge to be *skinny*. Nothing is wrong with size six jeans, but we continue to succumb to the pressure to want the size two — even when we know that it's a ridiculous and unnecessary desire. We continue to keep ourselves from eating our favorite foods and tie on our sneakers for a few more hours of grueling, physical torture every day. So we return

to the original question: Why do we drag ourselves, frustrated, embarrassed and uncomfortable, out for daily runs or trips to the gym? Why do we choose the yogurt with granola for lunch instead of a turkey sandwich?

The two of us aren't the only people who are feeling this pressure. When companies like [Abercrombie & Fitch](#) come out with statements indicating that they do not carry sizes XL through XXL because they are targeting "the cool kids" or "the attractive all-American kids" with their products, the undertone of their message continues to tell us *if you're not skinny, you're not "cool," and you're not "attractive."* It is these kinds of clothing companies, paired with the [media](#) that begin to define what our bodies should ideally look like, and for women that ideal is a thin, flat tummy, while for men, it's a six pack and bulging biceps.

To begin to challenge these pressures and definitions of beauty, we need to take a long hard look at society. What kinds of images face us on a daily basis? Women in commercials and ads are skinny and beautiful—they don't have cellulite, the skin on their arms never jiggles, and love handles are part of a nightmare in a very distant reality. But this isn't the case only for women. The men we see in ads are perfectly sculpted with abs chiseled by the very hands of Michelangelo. Let's face it—has any contender on *The Bachelor* or *The Bachelorette* ever *not* had a six-pack or a swimsuit bod? We have reason to believe that men succumb to the same pressures to be fit as we women do. Last weekend we watched as three dudes who had never even thought about lifting weights in high school showed off their six-pack abs and flexed their arm muscles at a party in an attempt to impress not only us, but also each other. Every conversation they had revolved around getting big — which worked out great, because practically every conversation we have as women is about getting small.

But the images we see in advertising and media frequently aren't even real. They're [airbrushed and edited](#), thus creating an illusion of beauty that is wholly unattainable. When we see these kinds of bodies regularly in the media, we begin to internalize them as the "norm" and the "expected" and people who don't uphold this unrealistic beauty are labeled as "fat," or "overweight." Yes, this phenomenon penetrates our regular judgments and expectations. But it goes deeper than that—it's becomes what we call *lookism*. Lookism is the act of discriminating against someone based on their looks, including height, beauty, dress, and that's right...weight.

In addition to showing us what ideal bodies look like, the media even picks apart people who aren't perfectly thin. Look at what Fox News [did to Adele](#) after the Grammys for example. Not only did they criticize her weight, but they even brought in a nutritionist to analyze her supposed "unhealthy" habits and indicators, none of which came from speaking to Adele herself, but rather projecting their own assumptions onto her. And it's not just Adele—we do it to [all kinds of celebrities](#). This overwhelming criticism of people's bodies in the media leads us to believe that we should be worried about ours as well.

Lookism does more than affect how we see famous people; it penetrates our workforce, too. For example, we can look to [this case](#) where a man who had been promised a job found himself unemployed after being asked for his clothing size. Actually, thinner, more attractive people are more likely to get the job after an interview than their overweight counterparts, and are, in fact, likely to make [3-4% more money](#) than average looking, average weight people.

These facts about the workforce and the media are disheartening, but what's just as upsetting is the way we internalize what we "should" look like and begin to judge others for ourselves. A woman by the name of Haley Morris-Cafiero made a [photo project](#) called "Wait Watchers" that captured how people were treating her in public based on her appearance and her weight. From cops mocking her with their hats to young women slapping their bellies as they walked behind her, she has captured all kinds of different ways people have judged her. She [explains](#),

“...I don't get hurt when I look at the images. I feel like I'm reversing the gaze back on to them to reveal their gaze. I'm fine with who I am and don't need anyone's approval to live my life.”

We can all learn a little something from Haley. “Reversing the gaze” back to those who are doing the judging may be part of the key to dealing with lookism. We all make judgments about others based on their weight. Haven't you ever looked twice at someone who was bigger than you taking more than two Servo cookies and thought to yourself, “*You don't need that?*” It goes the other way, too. Have you ever seen the stick-thin girl on the treadmill and thought to yourself, “*Go eat a cheeseburger!*” Yeah, we've done that, too- probably one (or twenty) too many times. It's unfair to make assumptions about other people's actions, values, and behavior based solely on their weight. Some people watch what they eat and work out because they want to be healthy, and that's a great goal. But some people are healthy and happy with their curvy hips. Who are we to judge?

Maybe the first step we can take is to accept that not everyone—in fact very few people—are going to look like models from a magazine. We can begin to be honest with ourselves and learn to [love the body types we have](#), even if we're not all a size two. We'll start by letting you in on a little secret: We have hips. We have dimples. We get a little bit of a muffin top when we wear tight pants. But get this—so does everybody else. So what's the big deal?

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