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The Space I Own

Alison P. Lauro
Gettysburg College

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The Space I Own

Abstract

TRIGGER WARNING: Eating Disorders

I don't care what anyone says—being a woman is hard. Being a young woman has its own set of complications—we experience a lot of pressure to look a certain way, to act a certain way, to have a specific friend group; to act as social butterflies and to live up to a set of socially constructed beauty standards. And there are too many girls—myself included—who have fallen victim to this impossible set of expectations.
[excerpt]

Keywords

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, eating disorders

Disciplines

Pathological Conditions, Signs and Symptoms | Women's Studies

Comments

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

THE SPACE I OWN

October 29, 2014

TRIGGER WARNING: Eating Disorders



I don't care what anyone says—being a woman is hard. Being a young woman has its own set of complications—we experience a lot of pressure to look a certain way, to act a certain way, to have a specific friend group; to act as social butterflies and to live up to a set of socially constructed beauty standards. And there are too many girls—myself included—who have fallen victim to this impossible set of expectations.

I remember entering high school as a scared fourteen year old. I had lost some of my friends when they went to different

schools or quickly found different social groups; my relationships with my parents and sister were deteriorating, and I thought, in my naïve, tween mind that high school would offer me a new life, that I could be a new person, free from the self-hatred that was eating away at me.

But high school, as most of us can attest to, doesn't give anyone second chances, doesn't allow for differences from anyone, and certainly was not the self-loving sanctuary that I imagined it might be. I thought dieting would make it better, thought that being thinner would make me beautiful and popular, and allow me to love myself. For every pound I lost I felt an artificial sense of pride and love for myself—in reality, though, my self-hatred was growing exponentially; anything about myself that I could hate, I did. Any mistake I made was a failure, no grade I got was good enough; the people I talked to didn't really like me or want me there, the boy I had a crush on had found a more beautiful girl; I was lost in a room full of loud, boisterous freshman, and remained mostly invisible to my teachers.

I used these instances as ammunition against myself, proof that I was as worthless as I felt. I was praised for being thin and delicate when I lost weight. In reality, I felt like a linebacker: I took up too much space, space that didn't deserve to be inhabited by an ugly, friendless, dateless ninth grader who was simply not good enough. I remember walking through the halls, bowing my head, clenching my shoulders tight against my body, feeling extremely uncomfortable as I brushed past smiling classmates and hand-holding

couples. I stopped in the bathroom several times a day, checked my body and my face in the mirror, continued to feel unattractive and unworthy; silently hoped that people would notice my pain, but equally hopeful that they would ignore me, let me become smaller and smaller and melt into the walls and quietly disappear.

After going into treatment for my anorexia, I am fully—proudly—recovered nearly four years after my diagnosis. I don't normally talk about this part of my life, partially out of fear of other's judgment and presumptions, and because it is a chapter in my life that's not pleasant to revisit. Regardless, I think it's an important story to tell because too many people hide in shame, living secret lives with undetected eating disorders.

As a freshman at Gettysburg, things are different than in high school. Better in many ways, but now that I live on my own, I am more responsible for how I talk about myself and others' bodies, how I react to other's criticism. The beauty and plenty of servo comes with the usual comments: *I've eaten so many cookies today! Ugh I'll eat this but I'm going to the gym tomorrow; I'm skipping lunch; I can't eat that I gained x pounds, this has x calories; I have no self control!* There's no way to escape the comments. They are part of the young adult college culture. Truthfully, sometimes I participate in this conversation too—everyone's doing it, and there's a certain freedom in pretending I don't have a past that revolved around self-hatred and guilt and painful mealtimes. I don't talk about numbers—weight, calories, miles, whatever; I know how triggering they were for me, and I believe wholeheartedly that by using them I am most likely triggering someone else around me. I would advise anyone who finds themselves using them, especially at mealtimes, to think about the effect they might have on other students sitting around them.

Perhaps there are reasons eating disorders are so common among high school and college-aged people. Especially in an academically challenging school like Gettysburg, you don't have to travel far to find a perfectionist, an overachiever, a competitive athlete or activist. Sadly the same traits that may make someone successful can also be a trait that drives someone into eating disordered behavior.

But, every year that passes puts me farther and farther away from those dark days, but it also puts that period of time into a greater lens of perspective. I understand more clearly the reasons why I developed an eating disorder, and it saddens me to remember the days when a girl as young as I was felt she didn't deserve to take up any space on this Earth.

Because my beauty is not only my body—it is my smile after someone's made me laugh, it is the pride in my voice when I accomplish something great, it is the fabulous outfit I wear on a Friday night, it is all the small, sometimes intangible moments that are not seen on first sight. Because beauty cannot be found on the number on the back of your jeans, the circumference of your waist, or the miles you've racked up on the treadmill. Beauty is untouchable; it does not age, it is not defined by anyone except you. But if you choose to believe that you have no beauty, then you may never see those moments, never see the beauty that others surely see in you.

So please, open your eyes—and your heart, and your mind— wider.

Alison Lauro '18
Staff Writer