

Beauty. Defined in the English dictionary as an individual's aesthetic beliefs. For me, beauty cannot be defined with a dictionary. The world we live in suggests that being ourselves isn't okay. Society expects women to look beautiful. You have to wear makeup to fit society's idea of beauty. Oh wait, you can't wear too much makeup because you'll look fake. Don't wear too little either or you'll look plain. You don't fit into a size small? You're fat. You're naturally skinny? You're anorexic. You're naturally bigger than some girls? You're lazy. You have to dress nice too. You have acne? Gross. Who made these rules for women? It seems like we can't win. We struggle everyday just to look decent enough to leave our houses. TV, Movies, magazines, social media, billboards, and commercials all pressure people to look like the pictures they're advertising. The problem? These models are photoshopped, airbrushed and 23% lighter than the average woman. Want some statistics? According to the National Eating Disorders Association, 70% of 6-12 year olds want to be thinner. The National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders stated that anorexia is the third most common chronic illness amongst adolescents. I will discuss how the media influences body image, how this affects adolescents, and eating disorders.

Beauty. At the mention of this word girls want to take a look into a compact mirror, sizing themselves up with the nearest advertisement featuring a flawless model. When they look in the mirror they scan themselves for flaws, an endless list of insecurities running through their heads. Sound familiar, ladies? Every girl has done it at least once in her life, but it isn't her fault. Women have been taught to compare themselves to others for most of their lives. There are advertisements everywhere, drilling this unrealistic idea of beauty into every woman's mind in America. You and I know it too well, magazines, movies, and commercial amongst other outlets have fed girls with that they can only be perfect if they have long legs, perfect hair and curves in all the right places. According to modern day society, girls should

walk and talk pretty, have perfect skin; and wear makeup; they should watch their weight and be fashionable. Media portrays this sparkling image of what they think girls look like, but the facts is that most of us don't. Girls try and fit themselves into this image of perfection and too often it comes at a costly price. Society is used to hearing about girls skipping meals and purging because the sad fact is that it is so common nowadays. For years eating disorders have plagued woman who just want to feel beautiful. Many girls set out to change themselves from hair to makeup routine and beyond.

My question is: why? why pursue a superficial image that is ultimately unattainable? Why conform to society's distorted standards? Why choose to give in and believe that you aren't good enough? From a young age I felt the need to be thinner and prettier. I've always been bigger than the other girls and I've experienced a handful of bullying and harassment for my appearance. Everyday at school I see girls who are self conscious of themselves. When I go to the bathroom I see girls standing in front of the mirror fixing their hair or adjusting their outfit or reapplying makeup. I even had an experience where I thought I heard a girl trying to throw up. Sad, isn't it? It's sad that so many teenagers feel pressured to look attractive. Teens tend to place more importance on their appearance than they should. The body type portrayed in advertising as the ideal is possessed naturally by only 5% of American females according to the National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Associated Disorders.

The TV shows we watch, movies, magazines, commercials, everything. It seems like everywhere you go there is pressure on people's appearance. Media doesn't portray people in a realistic way. The National Alliance on Mental Illness gives some interesting statistics such as: 95% of those who have eating disorders are people between the age of 12-25. 81% of 10 year olds are afraid of being fat. Eating disorders have the highest mortality rate of any mental illness. From early on children are taught by society that looks matter. Think about the little kids that are continuously praised for being cute and adorable. More and more children are spending more time watching TV. The National Eating Disorder Association claims that

over 80% of Americans watch television daily. On average, these people watch over three hours per day. American children engage in increasing amounts of media use, a trend fueled largely by the growing availability of internet access through phones and laptops. On a typical day, 8 – 18-year-olds are engaged with some form of media about 7.5 hours. Often overweight characters are depicted as lazy, the one with no friends, or the bad guy. Yet the super skinny women and the pumped up men are depicted as successful, popular, and powerful. I think we have all been trained from a young age to obsess with our appearance.

According to an article on ScienceDirect.com, research studies have shown that young people frequently report body dissatisfaction, with adolescent girls experiencing more body dissatisfaction than boys. Adolescent girls generally want to weigh less, while adolescent boys want to be bigger and stronger. There is no single cause of disordered eating but research has clearly shown that media contribute to eating disorders. The pressure exerted by the media increases body hatred and disordered eating. In today's society we are seeing children under the age of 12 developing eating disorders. The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry says that an estimated that 40% of nine year olds have already dieted and there are reports of four and five year olds feeling the need to diet.

Profit-driven media, hand in hand with the multi-billion-dollar beauty and weight loss industries, rely on us believing a lie. The lie tells us beauty comes in one form that anyone can attain with enough money, time and effort. The first step to fighting back against negative body image is recognizing the harmful messages the media is sending us. The second step is redefining the way we see our own bodies. The third step to fighting back is resisting the harmful messages the media is sending us. We are so much more than just a image. We are all beautiful and perfect just they way we are.

It's been a long hard journey, but I am finally starting to love myself. I don't have perfect skin, long eyelashes, and perfect lips. I don't have long healthy hair. I'm not skinny. But guess what? I'm beautiful. My rolls, cellulite, stretch marks, curves, scars, acne, and split ends. Everything that I used to define as a flaw are merely features that make me unique. Life is too short to hate yourself. Life is too short to break your mind over being thin. Everyone

deserves to know what self love is. Once you do those 3 steps, fighting back, redefining and resisting, no one can stop you.

We are expected to be unhappy with our appearance and to hate ourselves. Spread self love, not self hate. Let's change beauty standards and redefine the way society thinks of women. No matter what there are going to be people that don't like your body type. No matter what there are going to be people to pick at your flaws and try to bring you down. No matter what there are going to be people that will judge you and the way you look, and no matter what there are always going to be people who don't like you or your appearance. So why not learn to love yourself the way you are?