Aiming for Perfection

When it comes to body image, especially for women, most feel that they are not good enough. Society has put into place these unattainable standards that people strive to achieve and end up overall hurting ourselves. To understand the pressure of wanting to be this perfect image in society’s eyes you must understand two things. First, what exactly are we being told is the standards that we should be. Summer Oakes in her article “the skinny of fashion’s body-image issue” goes over the standards of being a model and how some of that culture has gone mainstream. As well as Tamimah Zucker who in her article “society’s standards of beauty will get old, but being comfortable with yourself never will” discusses some of the current standards that are seen as the perfect body. The next thing to understand is how are these ideals for body image affecting us. In Emma Woolf’s article “why is skinny-shaming ok, if fat-shaming is not” she talks about how even though she was skinny for most that wasn’t good enough and how she was constantly told this. Lindsay Hunter in her article “you are a jigsaw puzzle with missing food-shaped pieces” also discusses her constant struggle with weight and how she was never good enough. By understanding these two things about body image you can understand the pressures society has put on us.

Society has standards for beauty and in Zucker’s article she breaks them down and discuss how beauty should really should be seen. “beauty is modeled by society” she talks about how fashion, ads, entertainment, photoshop and Botox has shaped our understandings of what beauty is. “we are trained to believe the size two is perfect” (Zucker) and what we see as beauty
is really “the objectivity of beauty” (Zucker). She gives examples of this objectifying beauty, in that “40 has become the new 30, and now 60 has become the new 40” (Zucker). There are these standards that you must look younger than you really are and that in looking younger than you are you must be attractive. She goes on to say that it is not terrible for us to want to attractive but “this does not mean that we should succumb to society’s encouragement to melt off the years.” (Zucker). In addition, she states that “we should stop valuing their bikini bodies and instead recognize their true accomplishments.” (Zucker). She adds “better yet, think of beauty as an attitude, as confidence and as a character” (Zucker).

Oakes in her article talks about how models are “often encouraged to lose ten pounds” and “the pressure to be unreasonably thin is a reality” as these are the standards being put on models. This is a big part of Oakes article in how she breaks down the Body Mass Index (BMI) and how models today fall in relation to it based on the standards of the industry. She starts off stating that it is a known fact that the fashion and modeling industry struggles with issues when it comes to body image. In discussing this you must take in to consideration what the standards for models were just twenty years ago. Twenty years ago, “the average model weighed eight percent less than the average women” (Oakes) to put that in to pounds that is models weighing an average 129 pounds and an average for women at 140 pounds. Today “the typical model weighs twenty three percent less” (Oakes) than the average women. Now the average weight for women today is 160 pounds which would put the average for models at 123 pounds. This is not a huge drop in terms of the model’s weight from twenty years ago but as Oakes explains “for a 5’10’’ women (a typical model height), 129 would have made the 18.5 BMI cut-off and 123 pounds would be considered underweight” (Oakes). This BMI cut-off that she is talking about is the “safeguard” that “the international fashion community” put in to place to fight “agents unhealthy
body image” (Oakes). It was put in to place after several models died due to complications from eating disorders. Country’s like “Spain, Sao Paulo, Brazil, Italy and Israel have passed bills prohibiting models from working with a BMI below 18.5” (Oakes). but there are still countries who have yet to put such things in place and companies are getting away with putting models in unhealthy situations. Weight issue relating to model’s body issues also has a mental strain on their bodies it is not only that they are at an unhealthy weight, they now mentally conditioned to think that if they are not that size they are worthless.

The effects of these standards are seen as Woolf starts out her article in saying that “no one should be disadvantaged or ridiculed for their weight” and in saying that statement it is assumed that you are talking about fat-shaming. Woolf is not talking about that though. “we all know that fat-shaming is wrong… But what about the flipside: why is skinny-shaming OK, if fat-shaming is not.” (Woolf). She goes in detail to all things she is repeatedly ridiculed for just because she is skinny. On example that resonates the most is when she talks about how one of her colleagues would talk to her. She “would always urge me, loudly, to have a croissant. She would prod me in the side, in a friendly manner, and say: ‘look, she’s nothing but skin and bone!’… she was drawing attention to my size in a way that would have been unacceptable had I done the same to her.” (Woolf). It is very true what she says and she list’s off other names that the media and people every day use to describe thinness that are offensive such as “skinny, angular, boney, skeleton, lollipop-head.” (Woolf). It is in being called these things that offensive there is a relation to fat-shaming as she says, “I know the experience of feeling that one’s private pain in on display on one’s body, of being stared at, and feeling horribly conspicuous.” (Woolf). Woolf’s point is to draw attention to the fact here she is being called similar things to fat-
shaming, yet it is expectable. Just because someone is skinny does not mean that don’t have feelings and in saying these things can be as damaging as calling a person fat.

It is in Hunters article that you see the effects of the standers take place through physical actions. Hunter, in her article “You are a jigsaw puzzle with missing food-shaped pieces” tells the story of who she was and who she is and how even after everything she stills struggles. Hunter struggled with over eating and anorexia severely through her childhood leading in to her twenties. This steamed from her believing that she was not good enough just because her body was shaped a certain way. From her believing this and other family issues her thoughts turned in to actions. This is shown when she starts talking about herself. The previous short paragraphs with lengths of two to three sentences are cut down to two to three words. These paragraphs are mostly related to her abandonment of food. In addition, even though these paragraphs are short they are the ones filled with the most emotion from hunter showing how much she still struggles. Even at one point referring to her past self as “she, not I” (Hunter). You can also look at her writing in the other way as where she talks about over eating you can often find a long descriptive paragraph. This also shows her continuous struggle with over eating. It is how hunter write and composes her article itself that also tells her story of struggle and how she is still marching forward. Now in her forties she still struggles not as severely as when she younger but she still says “Most days, my goal is to take a step. And then another” (Hunter). The social reality of eating disorders or mental disorders is that you have a bottom point and then you get help and you are automatically better and if you are not automatically better than you are not trying to get better. Hunter is now way past her worst still worries about falling back to where she once was.
By understanding the standards that society puts on body image that Zucker and Oakes describe we can than better understand the reactions from them. As Zucker describes in her article about standards of body image the want to feel attractive and look younger are some of the current standards that the media is conveying. As well as Oakes in her article about model’s standards in fashion and the standards that society sees because of it. Most people are not a size zero, but this is what society shows as the norm and expects everyone to be. You then have Hunter who shares her story of struggling with an eating disorder because she felt she was not good enough. You also have Woolf who talks about how she is constantly being told she is not good enough. She is skinny yet that is not good enough. Through looking at these articles you can see that body issues are something that society is still struggling with. We hope that people “stop valuing their bikini bodies and instead recognize their true accomplishments.” (Zucker). She adds “better yet, think of beauty as an attitude, as confidence and as a character” (Zucker). And from that society will start to realize what is happening and start to change from it. But for now, body issues from the standards of society are a current and real issue.

The effects of how this idea of perfection affects us can even relate to how I was treated when I was younger. Always as one of the smallest friends in the group, the one that everyone pointed to telling me how lucky I was to be that skinny and tiny. I always wanted to be bigger then what I was though. I was the odd one out and wanted to be like the masses. It was not always compliments though for being skinny. It is always mentioned how fat shaming is such a terrible thing but what people don’t address is how skinny shaming is just as bad and detrimental to people. Body shaming in any form is a bad thing no matter the size of the person. Being able to feel comfortable in your own body does not become aromatically easy just because you are skinny. For the longest time, I thought I was disgusting for being so skinny. “your ribs stick out
and I can see your spine that is disgusting”, is what friends repeatedly told me. This is what I came to believe and what I thought to be true. Just eat more, your told. I have never been under weight at any point in my life and yet when I don’t eat everything on my plate I am judged, looked at like “your skinny enough, you should eat”. For the longest time, I was constantly uncomfortable in body. I wore a one-piece bathing suit, that way you couldn’t see my ribs and no one would be disgusted by looking at me. Just like any person it is just as hard to find clothes that fit me properly just because I am tiny it does not make these things easier. The pants fit in length but they are held up by a belt because the waist is too big, my tiny feet makes it hard to find adult looking shoes, and shirts often slide down my boney shoulders. It was not until years later that I had the courage to put on a two piece and realize that this is who I am and I should not care what anyone else thinks about me. It was also then that I started wearing more flattering clothing showing off my skinny figure and not being afraid to be myself.

Through this understanding of what the standards that society has put in place for body image we can understand why body issues are such a prevalent thing in society. Mentioned in the Zucker article was some of the influences in society that promotes the standards foe body image but there are more as the technology grows. A big contributor to how body image is perceived is social media. You have these standards that Oakes described at the fingertips of millions of people and what they see are becoming the standards of what body image is. You have both Hunter’s and Woolf’s article that is educating on the effects of these standards and being told you are not good enough. It is only by seeing the effects of the standards of body image that we can change them and realize the negative affect of them.


