In this issue, we explore body image. Our cover photos were inspired by a recent internet trend. Photographer Ileana Perez took pictures in the hall of random people and then a second shot of them immediately after they were told they were beautiful or photogenic.
Starving for Acceptance

It took me a long time to realize that I could find satisfaction only within myself. Others will always find something negative to harp on, especially with the way people look. It does not require much looking beneath the surface at who someone really is.

Growing up, recess was my daily nightmare. While playing on the playground, the boys I had childish crushes on and girls I considered my friends called me fat. I carried sweaters around constantly to cover up every inch of myself, even just to walk across the classroom. I never ran around with the other kids. I became aware of my every movement. I felt insecure of myself to the point that the farther away I was from everyone else’s eyes the better.

My family placed intense pressure on me, especially my mother. Her health kicks and passion for exercise only made me wish to lose weight more. She would take my siblings and I to exercise with her at the gym, but I felt embarrassed and ashamed of myself. When I ran, I would break down and begin to cry due to my anxiety towards exercising in front of others. However, I still felt the need to impress her and the rest of my family by becoming thin. When I compared myself to my other siblings who were much more athletic and in shape than I was, I felt inadequate and like I needed to change in order to gain my family’s acceptance.

When I entered middle school, my insecurities only became worse. With more exposure to the Internet, I would come across pictures of beautiful and thin girls, only making me more self-conscious. Other students continued to call me names at school: fat, gross, and annoying. It only deepened the hatred of my body and myself.

I restricted my meals until they became almost obsolete. I went the entire school day without eating and only ate a small dinner in the evening. The idea of eating repulsed me, and sometimes when I would eat I would force myself to throw it back up. Eating only gave me anxiety, my fear of weight gain and need for weight loss took over. I remember eating and instantly regretting it, rushing to the bathroom to alleviate the weight in my stomach. On top of that, I began to exercise daily in effort to speed up my weight loss.

I shed 50 pounds in three months. I became weak and even felt faint while walking down the hall. I would think that doors were opening in front of me when nothing was there, causing me to flinch. Even though weight was coming off, I was miserable and did not love my body any more than before.

Those around me began to notice my weight loss, but I never felt satisfied with my changes. I still saw fat on my body, so I still had more weight to lose.

My friends went from calling me fat to calling me anorexic. Rumors spread throughout school about my quick weight loss. Even though they were true, it still hurt to hear it out loud, and from the people I thought cared about me. Even after losing weight, people still weren’t satisfied with the way I looked and only made me feel bad. I felt exasperated. How could I make people happy with the way I looked? Nothing I was doing seemed to work.

After about six months I began to incorporate more food into my diet, my stomach had to adjust to the new intake of food and it took a while. Sometimes eating meals would result in painful stomachaches, which sometimes made progress difficult. But eventually I ate two meals a day, and then three, and even the occasional snack.

My focus shifted from losing weight to becoming a healthy weight and maintaining a healthy lifestyle. I changed my diet and exercised daily. I began to like my body more and more. However, this process did not happen overnight, only after a couple of years did I get to a stable weight and eating schedule, but I am still a work in progress.

I feel more confident about myself than ever before, I run every other day, eat healthy, and feel at peace with my body most of the time. Some days my self-consciousness comes back and it feels to easy to relapse and fall back into my old habits, but I know insecurity just happens as a part of daily life and I do not allow my negative feelings to get the better of me. I feel comfortable enough with my own body now and know the importance of loving yourself without needing the approval of others.

I wish I could visit my eighth grade self and tell her what I was doing did not benefit me physically or mentally, and that I was beautiful just the way I was.
What is your perception of beauty?

My perception of beauty is socially constructed and always in the hands of western European standards. It is very exclusive to minority groups and that took me a really long time to realize, but it is something I've internalized now.

Is it easier to talk about likes or dislikes?

I feel like we were both equally ready to answer because I feel like self-confidence was something I struggled a lot with throughout my teen years and the summer before senior year it really hit me like a train. And I feel like it was because of the saying "fake it 'til you make it." It is easier to think of flaws, but they are something that is on me but doesn't define me and the things about me I do like are something for me to appreciate when I am having a bad day.

Do you have a specific moment?

For the longest time I felt like society told me that if I wasn't this body type or have this face shape I wasn't pretty. Now, I don't know if I am society is becoming so much more. My reactions to the right people or what, but I feel like society is becoming more open to non-western standards of beauty. There is not just one type of beautiful.

What do you like about yourself physically?

Physically I try not to dislike myself but it is always something about my body shape and body size.

What do you like about your self-confidence?

Well...I don’t know exactly what I like about myself. As far as I am concerned I tend to focus more on the negative and comparing myself to others. We think about it a lot more than anything positive.

Do you think you are beautiful?

I wouldn’t particularly say I was beautiful. From a pretty early age I’ve always been self-conscious about being beautiful, so I’ve tried to make myself more interesting than beautiful through clothing choices.

Is it hard for you to talk about beauty?

Yes it is because I don’t really think about being beautiful a lot.

The Body Image Project

Christina Bui, 12

Sadaf Naimzada, 11

Brooke Elliot, 12

Brian Baker, 11

What do you like about yourself physically?

I like my dimples - I love my dimples and I'm proud of them. I have culture behind me and I feel like I am portrayed in my features and I'm really proud of that.

Is it easier to talk about likes or dislikes?

I think that the idea of beauty similarly; beauty is being comfortable with yourself and being happy. I have culture behind me, my self-confidence was something I struggled a lot with until junior year and I’ve found myself not to be beautiful so I’ve tried to make myself more interesting than beautiful through clothing choices.

Brian Baker, 11

Teenagers discuss views on themselves, beauty

Rules

1. If someone nearby insults themselves, make them give two put-ups. 2. Try to get them to say one physical put-up and one about their personality. That way their being less self-critical, but also making them think more about the things they like about themselves. 3. Don’t let them back out, no matter what. 4. Encourage them to start doing the challenge with other people.

Take part in the Body Image Project

The Body Image Project came from the observation that students were self-critical, and many of them lacked self-confidence and self-appreciation. This project intended to find links and opinions in relation to one’s self and one’s idea of beauty. Everyone grows up with different physical features and are told to link them to cultures or races; some set them apart or help them fit in. Beauty and physical appearance are intertwined. The project is about discovering what makes up true beauty, society makes it hard to constantly put those ideas into action.

I also heard people talking about how society and this image of beauty has been to others. We think about it a lot more than anything positive.

Do you think you are beautiful?

I wouldn’t particularly say I was beautiful. From a pretty early age I’ve always been self-conscious about being beautiful, so I’ve tried to make myself more interesting than beautiful through clothing choices. A skin graft is a surgical procedure where skin is taken from one part of the body and applied to another. For Spears, skin was taken from her arms and legs.

It is a shame for Spears to live with something so uncomfortable. In public Spears was stared at, mainly by adults. She began to become angry, she wonders why an adult would talk to a child in such a way. Her mother, nonetheless, tells her to pay no mind to people with minds like hers, she was still beautiful.

Eight-year-old Ebony Spears struts through a supermarket alongside her mother. They reach the checkout, and a woman nearby asks about Ebony’s unique feature concerning Spears’s scar that is visible on her forehead. The scar is a result of an accident. It’s a shame for Spears to live with something so uncomfortable. In public Spears was stared at, mainly by adults. She began to become angry, she wonders why an adult would talk to a child in such a way. Her mother, nonetheless, tells her to pay no mind to people with minds like hers, she was still beautiful.

Junior Ebony Spears has a unique facial scar covering the majority of her forehead. She received the scar when she was three days old. “After the doctors realized it wasn’t a tumor I had to get a skin graft,” Spears said. “Considering how young I was I couldn’t get every spot. So as I got older she really “severs” as it grows in normally should.”

Junior’s story continues on next page
Teen describes influx of new attention

Sit in class, most students would complain about the pains of assignments, but for junior Daniela Coreno, the pain resides with the throbbing emanating from her swollen feet and aching back. For the past 8 months, Coreno has observed her belly growing to compensate for the life she’s creating, attracting attention, both good and bad.

As the hallways fill with students, Coreno absorbs the stares of onlookers walking past her, all eyes glued to her belly.

“It feels pretty awkward,” Coreno said. “People just stare at me, I feel like they’re talking bad about me. They get disappointed because they think being pregnant is a bad thing, that I’m a bad influence.”

Despite the unwanted attention her belly brings, Coreno can’t help but love her baby bump. She and her family are excited to meet her baby in December. Coreno is most delighted by the ideal size of her belly, not too big nor too small, a flawless halo continuing to form in her torso.

“Nothing bothers me anymore. because I’m happy with the person I’m going to bring into the world,” Coreno said. “The only thing that matters now is the baby and what I want her to be: healthy and to live a good life. I’m going to tell her that no matter what other people say and think, she should ignore the bad and just make herself happy.”

Deaton relays her life with Waardenburg Syndrome

It’s the first day of seventh grade and Emma Deaton is participating in a first day icebreaker.

A classmate notices her unique eyes and says, “My dog has eyes just like yours!”

Awkward silence surrounds the two, as Deaton feels slightly offended by the strange comment. The girl tries to relate to Deaton, which intimidates her.

The student experiences a wave of embarrassment when she finds out that she may have just offended one of her classmates.

Back when Deaton was six weeks old, a single brown eye developed, resulting in two different eye colors, one brown eye and one blue eye, a case known as Waardenburg Syndrome.

“My dad has brown eyes and my mom has blue eyes, so it’s kind of like a little bit of each,” Deaton said.

“When we moved to Texas and I went to my new eye doctor, she asked me like three times to take out my contacts and my mom had to explain that I wasn’t wearing contacts.”

Deaton now carries on her life with her single clear blue eye, but she didn’t always accept her syndrome. Although her symptom is known to create clear blue eyes, it is possible to create two different colored eyes.

“I think the realization of acceptance came when I was in fifth grade, I was like you know what I’m not going to be ashamed of myself, I’m just going to love myself. It may sound really cheesy, but that’s what happened.”

Through the years Deaton has received many questions about her abnormality, but in the end Deaton shrugs off the comments.

“I’ve gotten negative responses, but I can’t really change it, it doesn’t matter to me,” Deaton said. “It makes me unique in a good way. [and] I’ve never felt self-conscious about it.”

Beauty in Disguise

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Without friends, Spears was left to entertain herself. She often read, played with her pets or watched TV.

Although Spears was battling with internal problems, she kept it all to herself and dealt with the situation as best she could. Spears kept her insecurity to herself mainly due to the fact that she felt like she didn’t need any help but once she found out that other people were like her, Spears started feeling a bit more confident in her skin.

“It was like a sense of relief knowing that other people understood some of the things that I went through,” Spears said. “They taught me how to accept myself and how to be comfortable around others that didn’t understand what I was going through.”

With her newfound confidence, Spears has bittersweet feelings towards her scar. Sweet because she’s finally comfortable with who she is but bitter because her family members often try to pressure her into having another surgery in order to smoothen out the scar.

“I’m not sure why they want me to change,” Spears said. “I guess you could say since its taken me so long to have some sort of confidence and self-esteem with the way I look. I wouldn’t feel like myself if I made such a huge change now.”

Spears believes the scar doesn’t necessarily reflect who she is. It makes her stand out more than others in a physical sense, but the scar just means she’s her own person. Spears has grown with and become comfortable with it.

“There are many people who struggle with the way they look,” Spears said. “Coming from personal experience once I realized while others may see my scar as a huge flaw I see it as the one part of me that makes me beautiful. [We] shouldn’t let other’s negative opinion affect how they feel about ourselves, we should be comfortable in our own skin no matter what.”