

Trying to Fit In by Eiril Strauch

Adolescence isn't an easy time for anyone. The fact that teenagers are constantly being surrounded by what seems to be an endless amount of judgments from peers and other forms of social sources doesn't make it any better. Whether it's regarding physical appearances, academic levels, or even just the clothes you wear, it's practically impossible to be viewed positively by everyone in this day and age.

Lately, the media has been focusing on bodyweight in a very different perspective than it had been over the past few years. Being ridiculously thin has been the “thing” for a while now, but all that is starting to change. Instead of body shaming larger, curvier women, the media, especially the music industry, is now beginning to embrace them with hit songs such as Nicki Minaj's “Anaconda” and Meghan Trainor's “All About That Bass”.

Celebrity influences such as Kim Kardashian have also changed the dynamic of what is acceptable and appreciated in terms of body image by suggesting that an extremely large backside is what is attractive and desired. Even though many people think that this is a step in the right direction, since different body types are now being publicly accepted, I strongly disagree that this is having a good impact on society, especially since the media's main target is towards easily influenced youth.

Why can't we just accept our bodies unconditionally? Why does a particular body type have to be 'attractive' for a certain period of time when it's not something you can change so easily? Why do we have to shame one person to make someone else feel better? By constantly changing what physical shapes and sizes are “in”, the main issue of lacking acceptance towards all bodies is not remotely being dealt with, but instead being perpetuated and ignored.

The song “Anaconda” contains lyrics that suggest that men generally dislike boney women. Stating that what seems to be a male significant other who “can tell she isn't missing any meals” is pleased with her body due to the fact that the areas that supposedly contain the most sex appeal are very large and curvaceous, and shaming women with a skinnier build are common themes in this song.

Of course, eating a healthy, balanced diet is incredibly important, but Minaj quite often insinuates that those who are thinner than average only appear that way because one way or another they force themselves to maintain a low body weight. This is very insensitive and rude towards women who are naturally thin, or have difficulty when it comes to gaining weight. In addition to this, she clearly insists in the song that she would prefer to be in the club with women who have large backsides. This reinforces the notion that unless you fit into a very specific body type that she approves of you are not wanted and clearly don't belong in the same social circles as hers.

Imagine the impact lyrics like this have on impressionable children and teens. Not only are they being told they must be somewhat eating disordered if they are thin, but also, they are being told that unless they look like Nicki Minaj or follow her body image

standards, they are not worthy of interacting or socializing with others that do.

Similarly, in “All That Bass”, Trainor raises the point that although she isn’t a size two, she can shake “it” (being her behind) like she’s “supposed to”. This insinuates that females are supposed to have similar body types to her and Minaj so that they can physically meet up to the expectations and standards of males. I see countless problems with this. For one, these songs are not only highly negative towards women who tend to have a smaller frame or less fat, and they also suggest that men who are worthy of women are those that choose to be with women who are not skinny. The fact that one of the main issues for girls with body image being that they want to appeal to males before even bothering to accept or love themselves is a lengthy issue in itself.

Girls listening to these lyrics may wonder if they have enough fat on them in the right places to attract men, which is not only possibly creating low self esteem and negative thoughts about ones body, but also reinforcing those relationships should be about bodies and appearances. Shouldn't the idea of relationships being mutual, respectful, and real be what impressionable youth are witnessing, as opposed to the ideal superficiality that the media is constantly showing them? Why is it that nowadays people aren't being taught to care for and appreciate their partners, much less one another based on unimportant factors such as these?

My final example for a well-known celebrity who reinforces similar ideas is Kim Kardashian. Instigating and promoting a backside obsession, the media has been focusing on how large her backside is and making this of utmost importance and interest in the media, although her own does not appear to be entirely natural and was potentially rendered to something very artificial at some point. Again, these influences are often perceived by youth as that unless they undergo surgeries and change specific body parts they are not sexy enough, pretty enough, or even good enough to be part of society. This needs to stop. These ideals are helping to create harm, damage and promote ignorance.

I spend at least two hours every day reassuring my friends that they are okay. I have far too many friends that are constantly falling apart because they feel like they don't fit in due to the way they look. Too many tears have been shed, too many hours have been wasted obsessing about what to wear, how much make up to put on, or how to make oneself look pretty or even just acceptable to others. Many of my peers and other people I know have disclosed some saddening cases of their personal struggles regarding these never-ending pressures. “I spent years trying to lose weight so that I would be accepted by society, but now I get made fun of for being skinny as a stick. I can never win.”

Although I try to remind my friends that they don't have to change or work nearly as hard as they do to be something someone else may want or desire, it's hard for them to accept these messages since they have been bombarded on a daily basis by the media giving them the exact opposite message. “I've always been small, and guys used to find that cute, but now it's like their preference of girls is changing based on what they think they're supposed to want.” It is so upsetting to hear girls struggle with what they think boys perceive of them and how they wish that they could change themselves one way or

another to please everyone else. I wish I could spend more time talking to people about other things in life, such as finding happiness, exploring passions, and enjoying each precious moment rather than reminding my friends that their goal in life should not be to please a boy in bed by being physically appealing because the media suggests that it is.

Psychotherapist Marilyn Riesz who specializes in the treatment of eating disorders has disclosed some of her views on this situation to me. "I believe that the influence of the media on teens today is having a negative impact on self-esteem and body image. It's very sad to see teens become so preoccupied with food, weight, and the opinions of others to the extent that it ends up impacting their health and possibly creating life-threatening eating disorders. It is important for everyone to try and listen to what their body needs, eat all foods in moderation, and love and accept their bodies unconditionally regardless of media or outside influences."

This being said, I truly do believe that a far better approach to dealing with this persistent issue would be for the media and other influential sources to begin looking for ways to advertise the idea that everyone is beautiful regardless of their physical build or appearance.

Wouldn't it be nice just to be appreciated, accepted, and seen as beautiful for who you are naturally and not what you're supposed to be?