

Mind vs. Body

Isn't one's body supposed to work together for optimal function? It doesn't seem like mine does, it seems like my mind and stomach belong to two different people. As a young woman, I have struggled with ongoing negative thoughts and mental health issues. Such a simple thing as food, the original hunting and gathering prize that is supposed to keep us alive and happy, seems like it is threatening to do just the opposite to me.

Growing up, from Maui to Colorado, I have always lived on some sort of farm. My family prides itself on growing and producing a portion of the food we consume. I grew up aware of way more about the food system than many people my age. I have seen packets upon packets of seeds turn into meals. I have seen the amount of work it takes to turn a destroyed, forgotten piece of land into a wonderland of green. I have seen healthy happy animals being slaughtered and turned into cherished food on my family and friends plates. I have seen the good and bad without shying away, and in reality, without realizing it was anything special. I was completely unaware of what an important and rare thing I was being exposed to. One of my earliest memories as a kid was a scary one. My parents never believed in the tradition of eating toxic and industrially manufactured candy on Halloween, so about 10 years ago, they normalized the concept of death for me instead. I stood in our backyard on that Halloween morning and watched my step dad cut the head off a chicken. Watching it run around headless, I just wished my family could be a "normal American" family. I was so mad and unhappy while I stood there plucking each and every feather out of a dead, headless chicken. What kid, or even adult, knew it would take less than a day for a living, moving organism to be transferred onto your plate, and not look or taste anything like store bought meat.

For the first 11 years of my life, my mother worked herself to death in order to provide the healthiest and real food she could for my sisters and I. Because she was so set on avoiding the junk food that so many people crave, I started to secretly get my hands on as much as I could. I would walk to the Walgreens across from the Rec Center and stash my backpack with doritos and lollipops. I would pretend to be sick on the days my family volunteered up at adaptive sports during the winter so I could sit and watch youtube and eat all the food I snuck in. This turned into not only a bad eating habit at such a young age, but it also turned into a long-term mindset for me. I was always an active kid who loved to be outside and run around, but just because my body looked skinny doesn't mean I was healthy. To this day, I struggle with looking at my body to assess how healthy I am. For a couple years now, I have struggled with

my body. When I hit a certain age and weight, I got used to hearing that I need to stop eating bread, cheese, sugar, chips, just about anything that wasn't vegetables, fruit or meat. I was normal for certain people in my family to tell me I need to lose weight, in their own words. I never realized that my reality shouldn't have been running up and down a hill until wanting to puke whenever I got in trouble. I got used to seeing my older sisters in the same depression about how they looked compared to the magazines and my parents eyes. I got used to seeing my sister almost killing herself from an eating disorder. Wasn't this all just normal for girls hitting puberty?

On November 7th, 2019, I went to Europe for three weeks and ate whatever I wanted because I wanted to taste the new cultures. Tasting different foods and seeing their everyday life was a huge shock for me, a 16 year old who was used to just one way of life. But even through those new and positive lessons, I hated how I looked because of how I let the idea of food take my body over. I tried to fix my sadness by just not thinking about it. Telling myself I would diet when I got home. And that's exactly what I did. I returned home about a month before Christmas and promised myself I was going to stop eating all the refined sugars that I didn't need. Every time I told someone about this, they would just respond with the typical; "You can't do that, everything has sugar", and yes, to a point this is true. I continued to eat fruit and more natural sugars, but I swore off most of the industrial and artificial sugared foods and drinks. I was so happy to finally see weight dropping and I thought I found my life long solution.

Christmas morning, I walked about in a pair of christmas pajama pants low on my hips and a tight white long sleeve shirt. It was one of the first times in a long time that I didn't hate the way I looked. I remember to this day the look and comments I received from my mother that morning. She just stared at me for what seemed forever and then finally said, "Wow, you lost weight, you look good." This shocked the life out of me because I didn't remember the last time I heard anything positive about my body from her. I always knew she never meant to hurt me by her critiques, but I always just piled them up in the back of my head and cried every once and awhile.

On that Christmas morning I didn't realize what her comment actually meant to me. Right now, thinking back on it, I realize that that simple compliment from her made me actually start to feel accepted by her. She was actually proud of me for what seemed like the first time. But just to counter the happiness and confidence I was feeling while opening my presents, she asked if I was bulimic. Looking over at her, I replied no as fast as possible. It took convincing, but she finally stopped asking me, but I knew she still thought it. This just set me back because

it seemed like I either was too fat or too skinny, so I was back to not being able to please her. The true thing that shocked me was that in the moment, I realized that I had thought about trying to lose weight that way, even though I saw my sister go through it and still struggle with that mindset to this day.

Being only 16, my mental health has hit lows repeatedly simply because of what my reflection looked like in the mirror. Everything that I saw in myself made me blame food for so long and still does to this day. At the same time, I am able to recognize that our mindset on food is just as important as our consumption of it. You can be someone who always strives to eat healthy and make sure your stomach is full and happy, but that does not mean your mind will be happy. I feel there needs to be unison between the body and mind where they can work together, not the body versus the mind. It needs to be happiness and acceptance over looks. And yes, I know from experience that sometimes, unfortunately looks are part of someone's happiness and acceptance, but that should be your own acceptance, not others. Food has been a huge part of my life, both negative and positive. I can proudly say I am very knowledgeable about farming about healthy food production for my age. I can also acknowledge that I have and will continue to struggle with the idea of food, but need to find a balance between self love, appreciation, a healthy body, and a happy mind.