

Tania Fils-Aime

Own Body

I was always relatively skinny growing up. I had two parents who had some weight on them, my only sister at the time who was average, and now my youngest sister, who is skinny and about the same size as me. I never thought much of it until my own parents started giving me crap about it.

Every night would become a discussion about my body. Whether I was wearing shorts that showed my legs or short sleeves exuding my long, thin arms, neither of my parents ever forgot to remind me, “Ou meg pase cow”, meaning you’re skinnier than a cow. With every negative comment, I would push back with “My metabolism is just fast”, but they never seem to understand that. It became a routine where when eating, my dad would not let me get up until my whole plate was clear and have me drink Ensure everynight in hopes I gain weight. I genuinely think they thought they were helping me rather than hurting. I never really had a big appetite so this led me to become more sneaky with finishing my food. I remember I would take a couple pieces of napkins and have them by my side while eating. Whenever I couldn’t seem to chew anymore, I would spit it out in the napkin and then flush it down the toilet. I did the same with the Ensure after waiting some time to make it seem like I was drinking it but my bathroom sink was having it more than I was. I was a tall, skinny, lanky kid in middle school with an awkward, shy personality. Just like everyone else around my age at the time, I was still figuring myself out, in terms of interests, hobbies, and style. I started not eating

during lunch in middle school but that was because I personally didn't like the cafeteria food, but that didn't stop one of my friends from noticing. She also brought up the fact that she thought it was weird how I never show my arms even during the summertime when school was still in session. I joined the girls basketball team from the 7th grade to my senior year of high school, I would wear different shoes, shorts, tshirts, but one thing that stayed consistent was my pink, salmon colored sweater. I would refuse to take it off and had my bare arms exposed until the shot clock had posted 10 minutes, meaning the game was about to start. Though I would have family or my peers make comments on my weight, or the occasional ring they would do around my wrist to state the obvious, I felt I was okay with my body until college.

I spent my first two years at Penn State Harrisburg with the guarantee of freedom away from home, even if it was for a little while. As a freshman, I had taken up the weekend party scenes with also the use of smoking weed and drinking alcohol. It was my first time doing all of those 3 things that I didn't get to experience like my peers, since living in a Haitian household. Few months in, I noticed my face was a little rounder and my stomach looked more bloated than usual. I took into account that alcohol seemed to make an effect, not knowing it contains a lot of sugar, resulting in weight gain. I noticed the cafeteria food also might have been an impact because one of my roommates who did not fall into the pressure of drinking or smoking, had mentioned she was gaining a noticeable amount of weight as well. With no money nor utilities but a meal plan, I had no choice but to continue eating the cafeteria food. I lived in a 10 person suite at the time and my roommate was a gym fanatic. It was a blessing and a curse. Still a dear friend today, she never failed to reassure me that nothing was wrong

with my body, but I still insisted that I wanted to tag along and essentially be a workout buddy. We would go to our school gym almost everyday and workout for an hour or two and then go straight to the cafeteria to get any healthy food options that were available. I was hooked on the spinach wrap. It started to progressively get worse when I wasn't noticing any changes.

My mental and emotional state was at its toll, I was having breakdowns almost everyday and felt unmotivated, depressed, and angry where my grades reflected that. Towards the end of spring semester of 2019, I was still asking my friend to send me any workout videos and meal plans I could do at home during the summer. This was the start of a neverending cycle with the attached of uncertainty and heartbreak. With every mirror I passed, I mentally noted that I was observing myself more and more. I would lift up my shirt to see if my stomach had gotten slimmer from the workout I previously just did 5 minutes prior. I would beat myself up for it everytime I would nitpick each part of my body, documenting my "progress" on my phone. It was all new to me when clothes started to fit a bit more snug and there was a noticeable difference. I felt wrong for not being comfortable in my own body and for feeling this way. Was I scared of change? Would I be looked at or treated differently? Or was this an *underlying* case of fatphobia? I made it a point to understand how though I may not mean it a certain way, it may come across as insulting, affecting another.

My sophomore year of college, I moved into an apartment with my same dear friend, and with 2 other people. Ready to start heading to the gym consistently again, I was still hit with the constant and repeating words of "I feel fat", "My face got bigger", "My stomachs huge", "I gained a lot of weight". With every look in the mirror, I felt bigger

and bigger. I had taken up smoking more than drinking that year which comes with one of its most known effects, munchies. I had no self control nor discipline and was still having a tough time mentally, I comforted myself with food, and I did not know how to stop. It was a constant cycle of binge eating until I felt like I was close to nauseous. I would immediately feel gross after and strict myself from not eating. I did not feel like myself nor beautiful in the body I was in. It was to a point I had to turn my own mirror in my room around just so I didn't have to look at myself when I got up. I quickly learned I was suffering from 2 eating disorders, binge eating and choosing to not eat at all as a quick way to lose weight. I have also learned that I was also dealing with body dysmorphia (BD). My dear friend confided in me, revealing that she had been struggling with BD before she even stepped foot into college. It made me think if we were lowkey enabling each other. I had a spam account at the time where I would post how I was feeling, and most of my content around that time was issues I had with my body. I had just posted something about how I can't eat anything without feeling big and how I wanted to lose weight. Though I usually kept it to myself and with the few followers I had, it was hurtful that a close male friend at the time who followed my account made a comment towards my eating disorder. I know he has seen my posts prior and not brought up anything about it, which was okay because I am not good at opening up anyway. But, it was confusing since we hung out literally *everyday*. We were hanging out in his room and I happened to be eating some sour gummy worm candy. From never asking how I was doing, the first thing he said to me was, "Aren't you supposed to not be eating that?" It genuinely caught me off guard, I didn't say anything.

Fast forward to Summer and fall of 2020 and the year of 2021, I had fallen back into depression since transferring and staying back home at my parents house. I had taken up smoking as a coping mechanism, still with the effects of the munchies. I was angry, upset, lost, and confused how I went from being somewhat okay with my body growing up to forcing myself not to eat for days on end. It has also been a struggle with trying to *stop* smoking. It is a constant battle in my head that it's either I smoke and feel I gained tons of weight to then restrict myself and lose more weight than I wanted to. It was a constant thought of, I wonder how much I weigh and eagerly looking forward to stepping on the scale when at the doctors. I was tracking my weight down in my notes and also had just bought measuring tape to measure my waist. I would Google endlessly on which healthy food products will help me lose weight. I would track my food down on an app, MyFitnessPal, and see the total amount of calories I was ingesting. I would carefully think about what to eat, thinking "I had XYZ this morning, I can't have this, it'll be too much." I realize the unhealthy relationship I have with food and try to not think as much of it when eating, but still is an issue sometimes.

Currently in the year of 2022, it's still a continuing issue but not as bad as it was my sophomore year. I have gone to therapy and have made progress with maintaining a good mindset in general, with food, and my body. I can say now though I feel more confident than I did 3 years ago.