



# MOVING BEYOND BARRIERS: BODY POLITICS AT MOREHOUSE

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New Jersey Governor Chris Christie underwent gastric banding surgery just months before launching his re-election campaign this year. With the looming possibility of a 2016 presidential campaign, Christie continues to be marred by comments, jokes, and concerns about his weight. Similarly, news outlets have also begun to question whether likely 2016 presidential candidates Rand Paul and Marco Rubio are too short to be elected.

While U.S. presidents have historically been tall and slim - with the last five all being at least 6 feet tall - this trend is not consistent among leaders at Morehouse.

"At Morehouse, the guys with height don't tend to do a lot on campus," said Jon Thibeaux, co-chair of the Campus Alliance for Student Activities (CASA), "and the shorter guys seem to do more because they feel like they have to prove themselves." Thibeaux described the "little man's syndrome" as a key factor in the politics on campus.

Clinical psychologist and Morehouse professor of Psychology, Dr. Yohance Murray '96, said that non-athletes may use campus organizations and other outlets to gain the visibility and power that athletes attain simply by participating in sports. Murray also said even though African-American males are the least likely demographic to suffer from conditions like body dysmorphic disorder (malformation of the body), college students are still within the age range most likely to be concerned with appearances.

"Freshman year I wanted to be sexy," Thibeaux said. "There are people who have nice shapes and their bodies are all right, but I wanted that kind of body that people look at and just think 'Damn, that body's banging.'"

During his first year he had a personal trainer, joined the step team and began dieting,

but eventually he was told he looked sick because he was too small. Once he became more involved in organizations on campus he had less time to focus on his appearance and started to gain some of the weight back.

Another student who was willing to admit to having concerns about his body, senior Grant White, also felt uncomfortable with his weight when he first arrived at Morehouse. As a domestic

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DR. YOHANCE MURRAY '96

exchange student from the University of California, San Diego, White is able to compare the role that size has in the two campuses' social atmosphere.

After enrolling at Morehouse, White described experiencing "fat shaming" when students joked about his weight and made him feel like his body was not acceptable or attractive. Even though he said he has become more aware of his size since enrolling, he has also begun to feel more comfortable with his body.

White, who began dieting and drinking Slim-Fast shakes in elementary school, has used many opportunities on campus to overcome his insecurities. By posing nude for a recent photo shoot; deciding not to wear a shirt in the school's pool; and going to the gym even when he felt intimidated by more fit students working out, White

has used the current conditions at Morehouse to develop as a person.

Thibeaux and White agreed that the media sets the standards that students use to decide what ideal men should look like, but studies have shown that most men don't live up to those expectations. Modelingadvice.org lists the average male model's weight as between 140 and 165 pounds but according to webmd.com, the average man in America actually weighs 191 pounds.

Dr. Gary Wright '91, a clinical and community psychologist and director of the Morehouse Counseling Center, said advertising and media outlets increasingly emphasize ideal male phenotype, but like Thibeaux and White, most students are equally concerned with other issues, so this occurrence has not increased the number of clinical disorders related to size and body image.

"From the perspective of somebody who works in the counseling center and works with students regularly," Wright said, "the issues usually are not related to how students look or how people perceive them because of their weight."

Thibeaux said that seeing that most leaders on campus are "slim or chubby average Joes" helped him feel more confident in his body image. He said he feels comfortable and sexy at 205 pounds but still works to live a healthy lifestyle.

Likewise, White said that being a member of the Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity at his California institution posed unique challenges, but he has been surrounded by support at both schools.

"Strolling was not always fun and upholding the sort of 'pretty boy persona' was more difficult," White said, "But my frat brothers and Morehouse brothers are there for me."

Murray said that as long as Morehouse continues to promote characteristics that matter, students will continue to succeed.

"We are a school that highlights integrity, intelligence, and character, and those things don't come in any physical shape or size," Murray said.

MT  
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## EYE OF THE BEHOLDER:

EATING DISORDERS, BODY DYSMORPHIA, AND THE LIES MEN INTERNALIZE

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John is a sophomore Biology major who excels at everything he does. He is on the debate team, he is the president of the pre-law society, and he leads a volunteer group to a local school every Friday to help mentor eighth graders. In addition, he exercises voraciously.

He takes various over-the-counter products to enhance his workouts and often exercises in the morning, afternoon, and evening. He fashions himself a "ladies man" and has concerns about his body odor and hair grooming. John often compares his physique to the models he sees in ads for his favorite clothing designer.

It is likely that John has a problem; he has body image disturbances that will ultimately prove to be physically and emotionally unhealthy. Body image disturbances and eating disorders are on the rise among men. According to National Institute of Health (NIH) research, it is estimated that 5 percent to 15 percent of cases are men. However, 40 percent of binge eaters are men. During the past two decades, the percentage of men who are dissatisfied with their

overall appearance tripled to 43 percent.

The primary diagnostic categories for eating disorders are: **1) Anorexia** – characterized by refusal to maintain normal body weight and an intense fear of becoming fat despite being underweight; **2) Bulimia** – discrete periods of binge eating that are associated with a subjective feeling of not being in control.

Body Dysmorphic Disorder involves a preoccupation with perceived flaws in physical appearance. Men who suffer from Body Dysmorphic Disorder are more likely to be concerned about their skin, hair, nose, or genitals compared to women, who are often more concerned with overall weight, body shape and general appearance.

A 2006 NIH study also showed eating on the cause in-

that men with disorders are rise be- of an crease in

cultural pressure for men to conform to a particular body shape. Further, it is likely that the more media men consume, the more likely they are to experience Body Dysmorphia or an eating disorder. In addition, Harvard Medical School researchers found that homosexual men are more at risk of having the aforementioned disorders. This is likely related to cultural pressure to be thin.

It is important to note that all of these disorders and behaviors have correlating emotional difficulties that often require professional treatment with a licensed practitioner. All persons seeking treatment should secure the help of a qualified physician and competent therapist who specializes in eating disorders.

Treatment often involves monitoring physical wellness and augmenting knowledge about and ability to respond to eating disorders. In addition, persons seeking treatment should engage with a certified nutritionist. An important part of any treatment protocol will involve directed family and social support.

On campus, a great place to start is with the Counseling and Disability Resource Center. There are licensed mental health practitioners who can help students with referrals and supportive counseling. Please contact the Center at 404-215-2636 or come in for an appointment. The Center is located in Sale Hall Annex, Suite 100.



**DRU SPILLER**

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Residents of Georgia have a 29.1 percent obesity rate, the 20th highest state in the U.S., according to "F as in Fat," a recent report by Trust for America's Health and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Obesity rates and the resulting consequences are a familiar topic for students and faculty in the AUC. Spelman's Health and Wellness plan implemented by President Beverly Daniel Tatum encourages students to track their weight, Body Mass Index and daily workout sessions.

In addition, AUC schools have added healthier options to the cafeteria menus. While the colleges can control the food served within the confines of the campus, students are given free rein to eat where they choose within financial reason. Fast food is a popular reason cited for America's increase in obesity rates.

With cheap dollar menu options at fast-food establishments and their proximity to campus, AUC students forego the \$5 organic spinach salad in favor of a quick meal at a fast-food joint. Late-night study sessions, midnight cravings, and empty bank accounts make the unhealthy option even more appealing.

"The convenience and cheaper cost of fast food makes it more accessible to AUC students and makes it more difficult to fight the health conditions that come along with it," Spelman freshman Symone Johnson said.

"It's up to the student whether or not to partake of fast food but the options

should be available because we are college students." While many have meal plans, there is still a temptation to not only socialize with friends, but to go to restaurants that are not near campus.

As all of the colleges in the AUC are making conscious decisions to have healthy choices in the cafeterias, fast-food restaurants located on campus can at times contradict these health promises.

"At Morehouse, Jazzman's is a bold statement in that they have a nutritious eatery and offset it by Papa John's, which is pizza," Joyce Terrell, a physical education instructor at Spelman, said, "All the eateries in the West End are good in one way because students are walking to the establishments. They're not easily in arm's reach, which has a lot to do with the area; Atlanta is not solely a college town so there are more choices that cater to several different groups in different areas, not just college students."

As First Lady Michelle Obama puts it, it is up to each person to make wise decisions concerning exercise and eating habits. Even so, what may seem convenient to the average college student can prove detrimental to the community. In a food desert, a term typically referring to the unavailability of healthy and reasonably priced food in communities populated with people of color, it is not a question of wise decision-making but a question of affordability and convenience.

The lack of healthy alternatives in the area poses as much of a threat to the students as it does to the wider community. Perhaps the health and wellness movement, with the vision of students and faculty, will spread beyond the black gates of the AUC and into the surrounding community.

THE FAST TRACK  
TO FAT

# A YEAR IN: A BRIEF REVIEW OF THE WELLNESS REVOLUTION

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The Spelman Wellness Revolution started with one woman's vision. Trying to maximize its financial resources, the college decided it would no longer support Spelman Athletic Department's varsity sports. Instead, Spelman President Beverly Tatum and the Department of Physical Education, Recreation and Wellness reinvested their time and resources to improve the overall health of the Spelman student body. It would prove to be a revolution unlike any other.

The Spelman Wellness Revolution was born out of dire changes made to The Great South Athletics Conference.

"Teams were leaving and the conference was making some major shifts. If we would have decided to stay, our students may have had to travel farther and be out of class longer," said Germaine McAuley, the director of Spelman's Department of Physical Education, Recreation and Wellness.

McAuley said the decision to leave the conference was just one piece of the puzzle.

"She [Tatum] made a very strategic decision and began looking at the number of athletes that we spend this money on [compared to] the bigger population of our student body," McAuley said.

The cost totaled close to \$1 million. McAuley explained that Tatum concluded it was more important to begin focusing on the health of all Spelman women as opposed to the small percentage of students who played competitive sports. She said she fully supported Tatum's decision.

"This was one of the best decisions we could have made because it's about helping young women focus on behavior change that will allow them to live healthy lifestyles at an early age and really understand the journey they need to take right now," McAuley, a former student athlete with over 30 years of experience in athletics, said.

She has coached both collegiate volleyball and basketball and currently serves as the instructor of Fitness and Contemporary Living in addition to her position as director.

The veteran fitness expert hinted at the importance of healthy eating, working out, and being physically active throughout one's life. She also said these factors

promote longevity and help one age gracefully.

Niya Garrett, a senior International Studies major at Spelman, says she is a fan of the Wellness Revolution because it accommodates the needs and wants of the overall student body.

"Tons of different programs are scheduled throughout the day to suit student schedules and varied interests," Garrett said, naming kickboxing, Zumba, and Flirty Girl Fitness as two of her personal favorites. "I like that they have different incentives to get students to work out more."

The fitness department hosts a number of programs that allocate reward points to students at the end of a class, and within three years its recreational facilities will be directed more toward fitness and wellness, with an emphasis on intramurals.

"We are going to start programs that will encompass participation of our student body in leading and playing tournaments, and things of that nature," she said. She also confirmed talks of an outdoor adventure program that would help students "experience and have an appreciation for" the outdoors.

The recreational aspects of the tournaments and outdoor adventure program will commence once Read Hall is fully renovated. The building will feature new and improved equipment as well as an indoor track, convenient during times of inclement weather. The tentative date for its completion is Spring 2015.

McAuley added there were a "small" percentage of student athletes who were disturbed by the termination of the Athletics Department. "But what I think happened is that they have adapted to the decision. They have come to the conclusion that this is the best."

Maria Wilson, a sophomore Political Science major at Spelman, says otherwise.

"I feel like the Wellness Revolution only helps when I need hours for community service," she said. "It is nice that we are having a new facility, but what is it going to bring to us?"

"I really feel like that money could have been put to better use. I am not that pressed about whether or not we have athletics," she said.

Wilson believes that Spelman should have directed those funds to academics instead. But since that didn't happen, she prefers that the money will be used to support the new wellness initiative instead of varsity sports.

## A WORLDLY PERSPECTIVE

# WEIGHT AROUND THE WORLD

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Weight, similar to factors like skin color, hair texture, and religious affiliation, often determines how socially accepted people are. Weight stigmatization makes inaccurate assumptions about eating habits, self-esteem, work ethic and physical stamina an enduring concern.

"Media has put a lot of work into chiseling out what is popular," Seretsi Khabane Lekena, a sophomore Dual Degree Engineering major at Morehouse College from South Africa, said.

Some argue that the western world maintains a rigid cultural perception of body weight. In creating and continually perpetuating archetypes of thin women and thin yet muscular men, the western world works to exclude and shame people.

At Morehouse, Clark Atlanta University, and Spelman College, although people still align with western standards of beauty, they are more forgiving towards various shapes and sizes in the African-American community. International students, having had the opportunity to live in their home country and in the United States, can elaborate on how cultural perceptions differ from the U.S.

"Here, there is a difference between thick and fat," said Nneze Akwivu, a sophomore Biology and French double major at Spelman College from Nigeria. She finds that divisions created by delineations like "thick" and "fat" are not prevalent in Nigeria.

When asked if she fits the socially accepted body weight in Nigeria, she responded with a firm no. She said that people in the AUC would describe her as thick, while she thinks she would be considered overweight in Nigeria. She noted that being larger is equated with childbirth.

"If you are big like me and you have not given birth, they will call you fat," she said. In her experience, the perceptions of body weight are framed not by European culture, but by tribal traditions.

Lekena was cautious about making comments about acceptable

body types in the United States because, "I'm scared to make the mistake of generalizing across the whole country."

He did say, however, that the typical American beauty is also the typical South African beauty. He noted that the range of socially accepted body types is larger than in the United States. He finds body types in Nigeria to be skewed away from skinnier women and more embracing of fuller women.

When asked whether he fit into the culturally accepted body type, he said, "The average South African guy is a lot skinnier (than Lekena is)." He believes that the United States explicitly shames people of larger sizes, while people are more covert with their shaming tactics in South Africa.

"Men tend to be slim to big," Jonathon Penduka, sophomore Biology and Chemistry double major at Morehouse College, said of the cultural weight perceptions in Zimbabwe. He said a recurring theme is that thin women are desirable when courting. After marriage, these same women gain weight. It is a sign of a prosperous household.

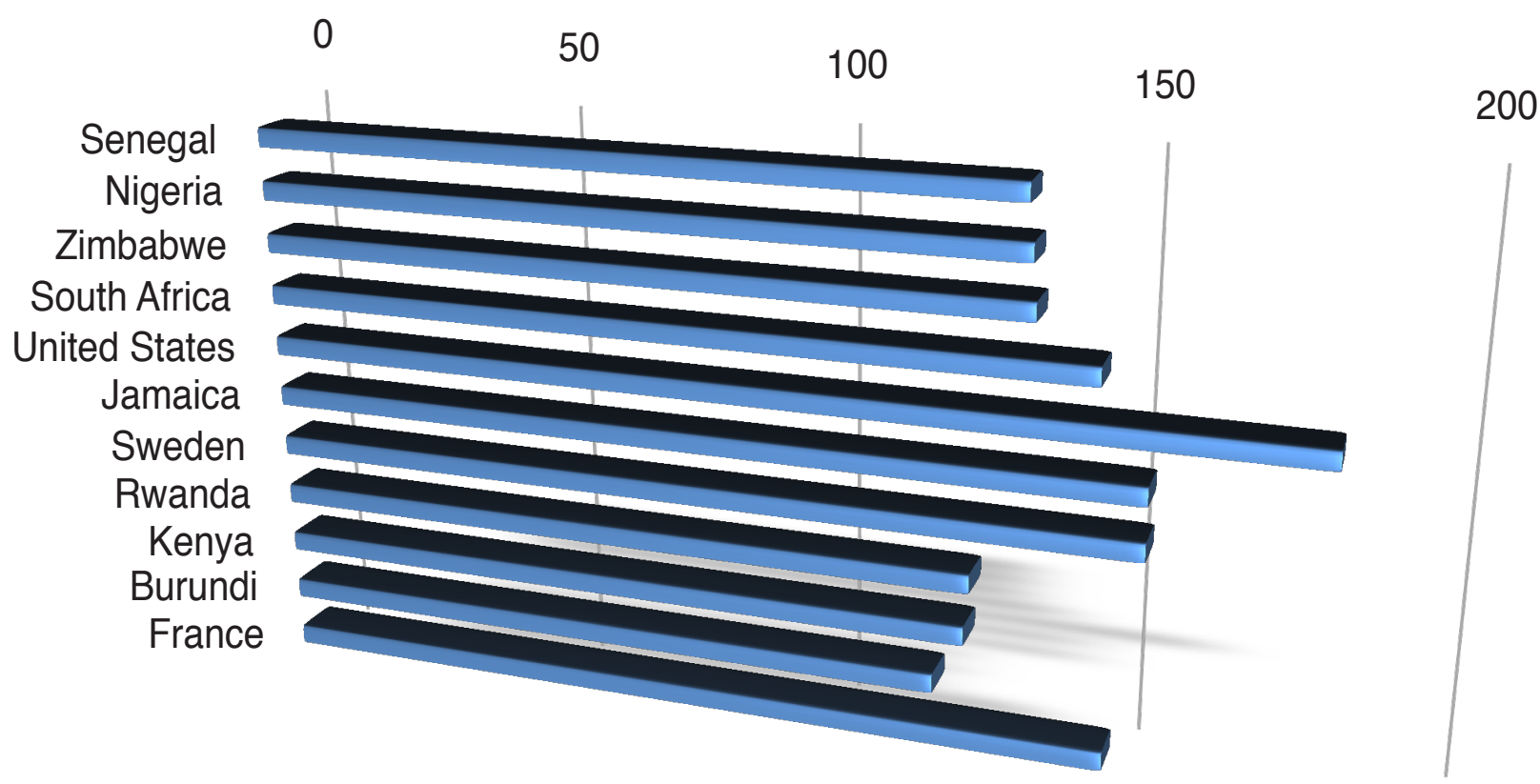
The norms, in his opinion, are perpetuated by parent interaction, pressure to maintain or have the appearance of certain social standing, as well as traditional beliefs. To him, a smaller frame seems to be preferable.

"Senegalese are known to be very tall, dark, and slender," Rugiyatu Kane, a Spelman senior Environmental Science major from Senegal, West Africa, said. "Young women especially are known for their model-like features and beautiful skin tones." She said that because she is short and curvy, she does not fit that particular body type.

"In the United States, the standards of beauty are similar across age groups," Kane added. "In Senegal, accepted body weights change as people age."

Similar to Penduka, Kane understands that there is a shift in acceptable body weight after a woman gets married because fuller figures are seen as a sign of wealth and beauty.

**The London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine compiled these average weights for an adult human in different countries. They were published in the June 21, 2012, edition of the British publication "The Telegraph."**



**Senegal : 133.1 pounds**

**Nigeria : 133.92 pounds**

**Zimbabwe: 134.53 pounds**

**South Africa: 144.77 pounds**

**United States: 180.62 pounds**

**Jamaica: 152.67 pounds**

**Sweden: 152.62 pounds**

**Rwanda: 124.86 pounds**

**Kenya: 124.04 pounds**

**Burundi: 119 pounds**

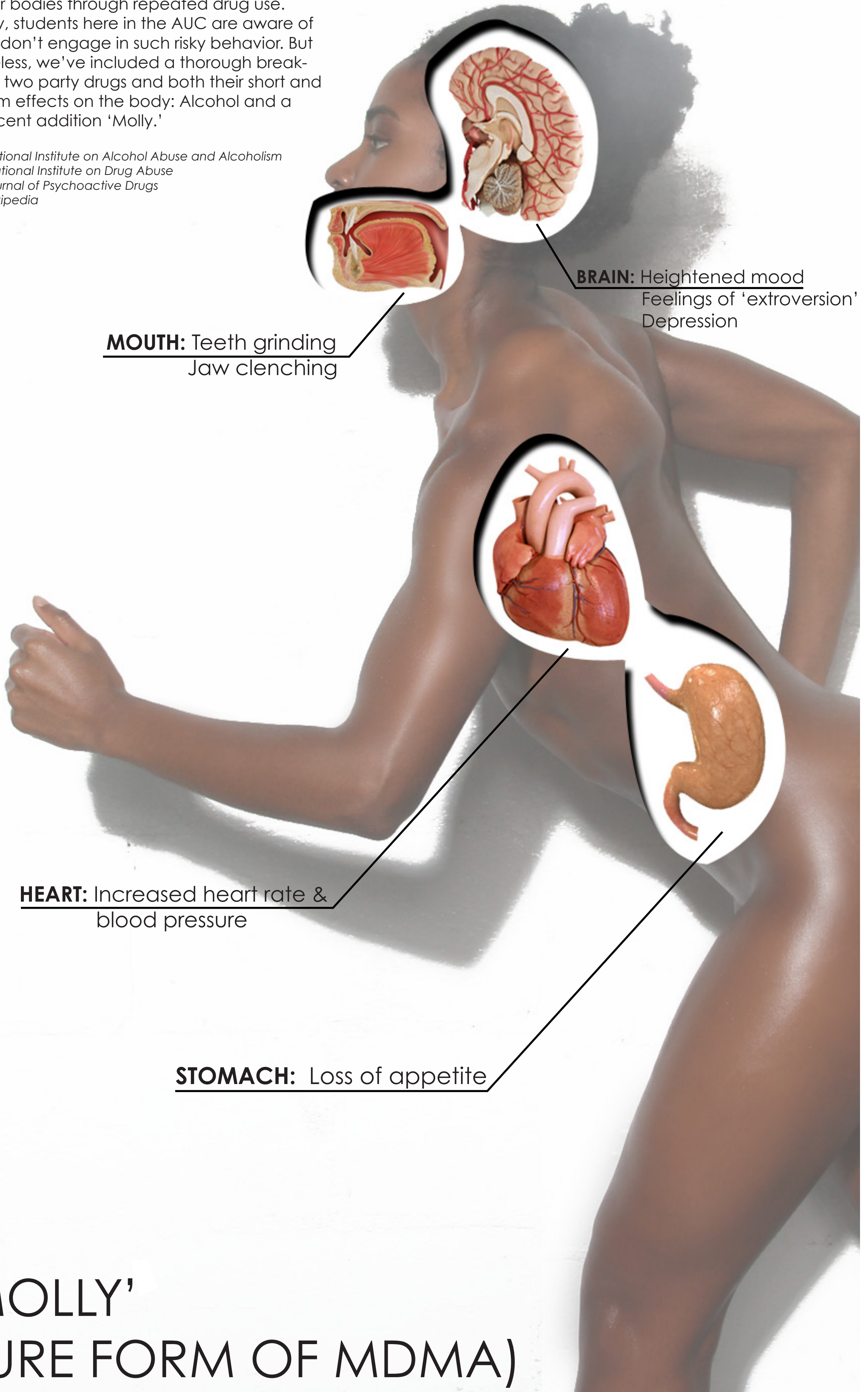
**France: 147.23 pounds**

# THE IMPACT OF DRUGS ON THE BODY

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College-aged students 18-25 can severely damage their bodies through repeated drug use. Certainly, students here in the AUC are aware of this and don't engage in such risky behavior. But nonetheless, we've included a thorough breakdown of two party drugs and both their short and long-term effects on the body: Alcohol and a more recent addition 'Molly.'

Source: National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism  
National Institute on Drug Abuse  
Journal of Psychoactive Drugs  
Wikipedia



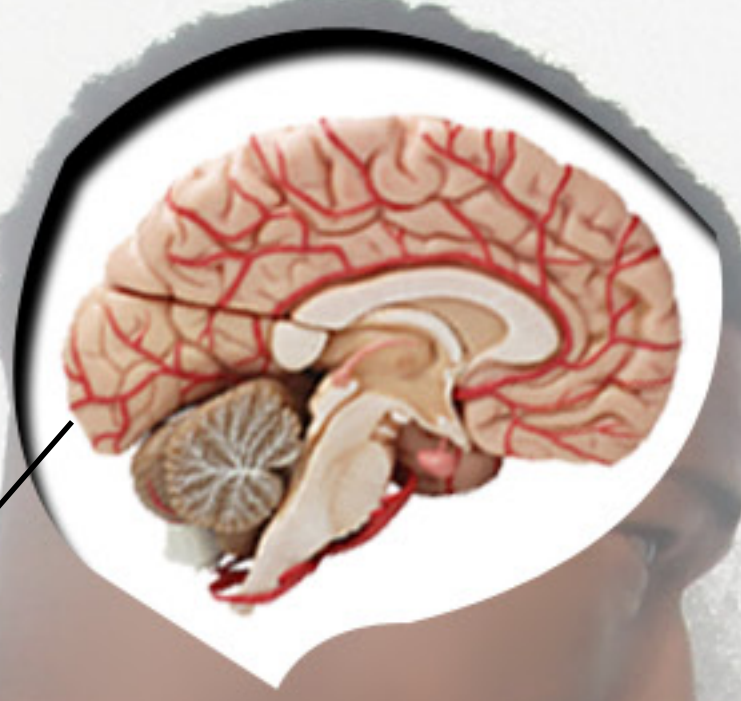
**MOUTH:** Teeth grinding  
Jaw clenching

**BRAIN:** Heightened mood  
Feelings of 'extroversion'  
Depression

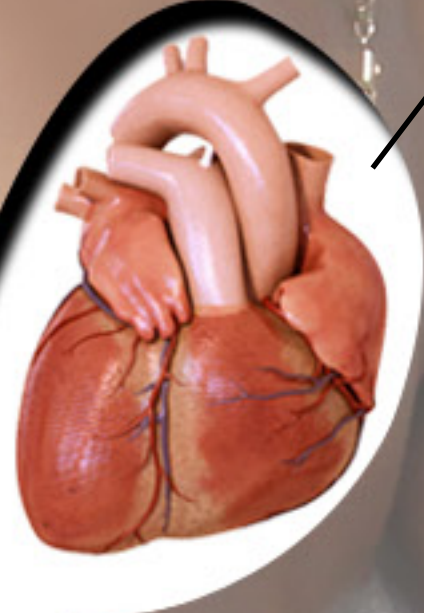
**HEART:** Increased heart rate &  
blood pressure

**STOMACH:** Loss of appetite

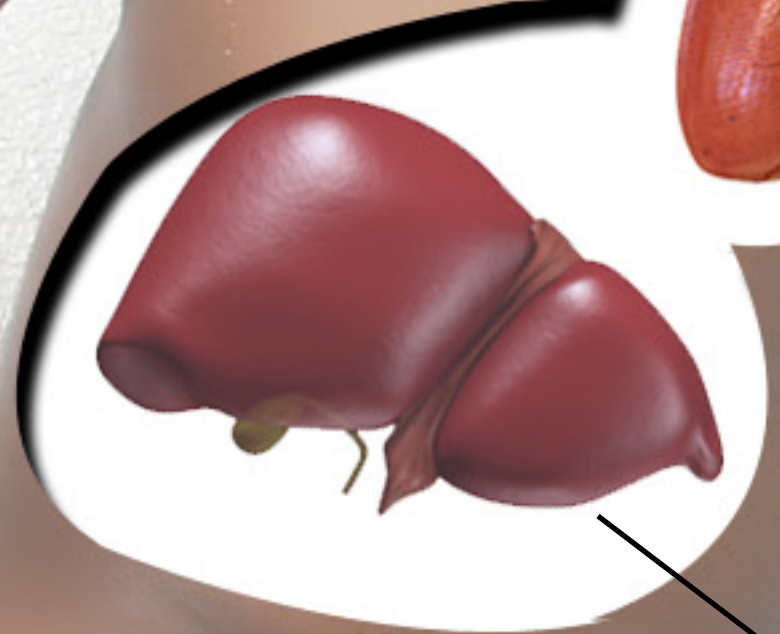
'MOLLY'  
(PURE FORM OF MDMA)



**BRAIN:** Alter mood  
Change behavior  
Impair thinking and motor skills



**HEART:** Irregular heart beat  
Stroke  
High blood pressure



**LIVER:** Fibrosis  
Liver Inflammation  
Accumulation of liver fat

## **LONG-TERM EFFECTS**

Risk of Cancer:  
Mouth  
Esophagus  
Throat

**ALCOHOL**  
(aka drank, po' up)

# THE STORIES OF THEIR BODIES



## PHILLIP BIGBY A SURVIVOR, AN INSPIRATION.

**The Maroon Tiger:** What motivated you to do The Body Issue?

**Phillip Bigby:** I've always had image issues related to self-esteem since I was a child. I thought this would be a good time, you know, I'm getting older—my body is not nearly as it was when I was younger. So, you know, try to boost my confidence.

**MT:** How did these self-esteem issues from your childhood influence your adulthood?

**PB:** I was a virgin until I was 20. I started drinking when I was 18 when I was in the military—so the first time that I did have sex, I was drunk. From that time until about 30...I can't remember having sex sober. So, I didn't really have a healthy lifestyle when it came to sex. And now that I am sober (I've been sober for 3 years now) I know the reason that I did it. I did it because at that time I was dealing with self-esteem issues with my body. I was a larger guy in up until I went to the military—I lost like 50 pounds in the military. And I didn't think I was attractive, so when I got drunk or high, it gave

me this false sense of self-confidence—and I think I held on to the drugs or drinking so long because that was my confidence, I didn't have that when I was sober.

**MT:** What did these drugs and alcohol do to your body when you were consuming them?

**PB:** Well the perception was that I looked good because I had lost a lot of weight. I used to do a lot of...stuff. Some of the stuff I used to do would cause me to not eat or lose weight. You know, I thought I looked good. I have a picture now where I thought, at that time, that I was looking good and now I say 'd\*\*n I thought I looked good.' But now I look much more healthy, my skin looks better.

**MT:** Leading up to and after doing the issue, was there a confidence built?

**PB:** It was more of liberation. I [have been] building my confidence since I became clean. You know, when you are doing something for so long and it's been masking something, you have to figure out what you're masking in order to prevent yourself from using these substances to mask it. I've been clean for the last few years and I figured

that I wanted love and to be accepted for who I was. You know, all this started since I was 12 when I lost my mom. When you have that comfort blanket as a child, you know someone has your back, someone is always there—I didn't have that. When I got older, I didn't get the help that I should have. I didn't get therapy as I have now—I'm a big [advocate] for therapy now.

**MT:** What are some words for other people dealing with body issues or substance abuse?

**PB:** My advice would be: if you feel like something is wrong, there probably is something wrong and you should seek help. You have to talk to people. I had to talk to so many people that I did not want to talk to because I thought they would look at me as being weak. I had to tell people... had to find someone I trusted, or even a stranger... I had to talk to someone because I knew that I couldn't do it alone. When you are fighting addiction or mental health issue, you can't fight on your own—you have to have support.

## CHI-ANTE SINGLETARY CLAIMING VICTORY OVER MY BODY

**The Maroon Tiger:** Why did you decide to do The Body Issue?

**Chi Singletary:** Because I was afraid to, actually. Well I guess it has... it's a very long story. So originally I was really afraid to because I'm on SGA, I'm an RA, like I've done everything under the sun on Spelman's campus and it's like, "why would I choose to do something so crazy?" But having experienced sexual assault right before I came to Spelman, it's been a long journey since I've been here to reclaim my body and reclaim my space, and last year in January I cut all my hair off. So cutting all my hair off was really the beginning of the process of me trying to reclaim my body and love myself, and I think that there's no better way to show my love for myself than to just lay it all out to bare. I know in the AUC one of the things we're big on is what you're wearing, what your hair looks like, but what can you judge if there's nothing else there to see?

**MT:** Yeah, that's very poetic. So, you already told me a little about this, but tell me about your history with body acceptance.

**CS:** I've always been really small, so I guess that was one of the big things was that I was always really small in comparison to my cousins who kind of grew into their curves earlier, and had more of the guys'

attention. And I danced for a while, so it was like I always wished I could be a little bit bigger and a little bit curvier, but then you know I always had everyone around me telling me it's so wonderful to be so small. A lot of the women in my family are very, very overweight, so it's always those extreme dynamics in my family between having women who are very petite to having women in my family who are very overweight. So always walking that thin line, and then after the sexual assault it was like... it made me feel like it was my size, or my lack thereof size that allowed this to happen to me. Just not being able to protect myself because of my size, you know just hating a little bit of everything about me. And then coming to Spelman where so much of everything is about what you look like and how big is your [butt], how big are your [breasts], how small is your waist, you know what I mean? All of these things are how sexualized we are, and as women we over-sexualize each other. So, just dealing with all of that and coming through it... I guess my big "aha" moment was cutting my hair off, and finding that none of that really matters. And then I started hitting the gym, for no reason in particular [laughs]. Just to relieve some stress, start taking some self-defense classes, and relaxing. Swimming was the biggest thing that helped me love myself... I swam several times a week, if not every other day.

**MT:** So you said that this incident of sexual assault happened how many

years ago?

**CS:** [Sighs] It'll be... three years ago.

**MT:** Okay, so is posing for The Body Issue, not that it's racy in any kind of way, but that's just definitely going out of your comfort zone. It's kind of ironic that going out of your comfort zone really helps you accept and hone in on who you are.

**CS:** It's crazy, but doing things that I fear the most... that's that irrational thing. All day I have to think about "is this rational," and I'm pretty type A, I'm a Virgo so I'm really organized and structured. So doing something that breaks the mold, something that scares me that pushes me outside of my box, challenges what I think is acceptable and challenges what I know to be the norm and I think that challenging, especially coming from my situation, challenging the norm is what I must do. I must challenge the norm of what I internalized what men are, I must challenge the norm of what I've internalized men will do to me, I must challenge all of these internalized norms in order to become a better person and I think that's something that would help everybody: to challenge the things we grew up learning, or the incidents or experiences that shape us, to see how big or how better of a person we become.



## JAMAL LEWIS BREAKING THE SHELL STEPPING INTO THE LIGHT

**The Maroon Tiger:** Already being a purveyor for self-expression, what were some of the reservations that even someone so poised in self-authenticity, such as you, had about posing for The Body Issue?

**Jamal Lewis:** In the back of my mind, I surveyed thoughts about how my body [and other large bodies] would be perceived, shamed, and looked at in disgust in comparison to others. After witnessing several students' response to The Body Issue overall, the unfortunate, closed-minded reality of students in the AUC and the conservative nature of the college and its usual respectability politics also ran through my mind. Other than that, I really didn't have any reservations. I committed myself to this project from the start!

**MT:** With these reservations, what was the driving force behind you deciding to bare it all for The Body Issue?

**JL:** The driving forces behind my decision-making were rooted in radical self-love, me having control over the agency of my body, and my understanding of how important it is to actively resist white, supremacist, hetero-patriarchal standards of beauty

and the disenfranchisement of womyn, fat, black, queer and disabled bodies.

**MT:** In your shoot the song "Break The Shell" by India Arie was playing. How does this song correlate with your choice to do The Body Issue?

**JL:** Having "Break The Shell" play during my shoot was simply neurotic and therapeutic for me. The correlation is found in the symbolism of the text and it reaffirms the notion of what it means to break free and live free of others' expectations. I saw myself as a young bird breaking free to fly.

**MT:** There is a message behind every choice and action; what would be your words of inspiration for those who are dealing with body image issues in the AUC and nationwide?

**JL:** To spend time loving the body that society has taught them to hate and to understand that [your] body belongs to you and what you do to/with it is your choice, and that beauty is more than what is seen in magazines and on television. It is diverse! It is wonderfully and fearfully made. It is you! Break the shell!

# THE STORIES OF THEIR BODIES

## STEPHANIE GOODALLE STEPPING INTO MY OWN

**The Maroon Tiger:** So, why did you decide to do The Body Issue?

**Stephanie Goodalle:** I feel like body image is such a taboo issue among people in general, especially within the AUC, we don't like to talk about it. And so many representations of what's qualified as beautiful in beauty pageants and things of that nature... so just to switch the script a little bit, and to take a stance against body hate and promote self esteem and all of that.

**MT:** Have you experienced that in your time since you've been in the AUC?

**SG:** Not directly, no, but just growing up, suffering through those issues, I wanted to, you know, explore it a little bit more and use this as a platform to really just say, "Hey, there's no reason why you need permission for self acceptance." That's the most ridiculous thing. And so, we're a bunch of young adults and we're getting ready to go out into the world. You should learn how to accept people for who they are, no matter what they look like.

**MT:** Yeah. Well that kind of got into my next question, which is tell me about your history with body acceptance.

**SG:** Well, I've always been like the "chunky kid" growing up, so just dealing with that. Um... kids can be very cruel, and when you're growing up people change, so that's not to stigmatize children when they're growing up or things of that nature, 'cause they don't know right from wrong. They're learning as you are. But carrying those burdens with you and hearing comments from

adults is particularly damaging. I know one time in 5th grade I was helping this lady out with a fundraiser and she gave me this recipe for that cayenne pepper lemonade, and I was like wait, what? And so I was just torn up for a really long time. And then like seeing all the other [skinny] girls... and I guess with skin issues too, not necessarily skin tone but with the clarity of my skin, like scabs and hyper pigmentation and all that. I picked my skin as a nervous habit when I was younger, so my mom would be like "stop picking your skin before you look like a little cheetah." You really should be cautious of comments that you say to other people, because you really don't know how it affects little things like that.

**MT:** So with those comments you received growing up, you said that this hair helps you feel like yourself. Were you not feeling like yourself prior to that, like were you having an identity struggle, not feeling comfortable within your own skin? How long did it take you until you finally realized "this is me?"

**SG:** I... I really began to, I guess, accept me for me my sophomore year of college. I started reading a lot of blogs, like plus-sized fashion blogs, and I was like oh my gosh, I can wear cute clothes and still be amazing and be me. 'Cause, growing up, I didn't have that imagery. People don't realize how much imagery plays a role in your development as a person. Having older parents, they're like oh no, you're wearing form-fitted clothes, but then I'm like I don't want to wear the baggy sweatshirt... And so, when you start to come into your own, you can say no, I'm wearing this, and I don't care what you like or don't like. And just taking risks... you know, at this point I still have days where I'm just not feeling the best,

don't feel like getting out of bed, but I still have those better days where no one can tell me any different about myself.

**MT:** Yeah, that's awesome. With the whole Wellness Revolution that took over last year, a lot of people are starting to say that the Wellness Revolution is, in an essence, fat shaming a lot of girls on campus. Tell me your opinion on that.

**SG:** I've been against the Wellness Revolution since it first came out. My feelings were made concrete when they had these posters [in Upper Manley] and it was like week one the girl was, you know, she was voluptuous, and by week six she had a thigh gap, her fro was smaller, her arms were smaller, and I was just thinking that it's such a fallacious argument to say that if you're overweight, you're automatically unhealthy. And it's fallacious to say oh, you're overweight, you're going to get hypertension and diabetes and blah blah blah. That's not true. You have plenty of thinner girls, not only on campus but in America in general, who have those same issues. And with the Wellness Revolution, I haven't seen any addressing of mental health, and quite frankly I think it's an assimilationist campaign. Like, if you're going to address wellness with black women, you need to address it holistically.

**MT:** Are you nervous, or are you feeling like this is your time, this is you?

**SG:** I'm nervous, but it's definitely one of those growing things, like, alright, this is my journey with self-acceptance and body image, and this is a big step. I mean, you don't grow without some struggle and some pain.



## NDUKA VERNON STANDING IN MY OWN SKIN

**The Maroon Tiger:** What type of reaction do you expect in the AUC as a result of your being in The Body Issue?

**Nduka Vernon:** [Laughs]. In the AUC, partially negative. Just because people may not receive the entire scope of what's being done... They might not actually accept the message that's being put forth.

**MT:** What message is that?

**NV:** The message is about the appreciation of bodies, self-image, and issues with self-image and stuff like that. So, I feel like there's going to be those individuals that are not responsive to it. And there's going to be those individuals that appreciate what is done in the issue.

**MT:** What drove you to be a part?

**NV:** First, when I was younger I grew up in a white community in Mississippi. I wasn't really as accepting of my African American and Jamaican background, or whatever. For me my body was... I hated my body because of my skin color and because it prevented me from fitting in with the people in the community around me. Also, I have eczema... When I was younger, it was worse than it is now... And I was ashamed to even wear short sleeve shirts... I used to be scared to wear shorts. When I played soccer, I had the socks all the way up 'cause I was just ashamed of it. It was really something that made me seclude myself from outings or just from the people around me, because of my eczema. I didn't really come to accept until really, senior year of high school. I started wearing shorts to school. That was really when I started accepting my body and the skin condition that I have.

## EMMA JACKSON FITTING THE MOLD GOD BUILT

**The Maroon Tiger:** What motivated you to do The Body Issue?

**Emma Jackson:** When Darren told me about the issue I was very excited to be in it. For one, I'll be in front of a camera which I am starting to love now (I'd rather be on a runway) lol. Besides expressing myself through the camera, I will be a part of history in the AUC while telling my story and bringing awareness to body image and health. Those two things are big in the black community, which we don't talk about. We want to be Beyonce or Nicki Minaj but no one wants to eat right, exercise, or stop drinking and smoking. I was also interested because I used to be self-conscious about my body. I am not built like a Coke bottle and all the guys in high school didn't talk to me (except my middle/high school sweetheart) but they wanted to talk to my friends who had boobs and booty. Now getting into college, guys love me and I love myself. God built me this way for a reason. lol

**MT:** Tell me about your history with body acceptance.

**EJ:** I have come to love myself no matter if guys like me or not, I am made this way for a reason. I learned to love my legs and lips because not everyone has what I have. I also learned that it's not about my body it's about my personality and morals. I never had issues with my skin color but the topic of light vs. dark skin did sit funny with me. Two of my exes told me that I was pretty for a dark-skinned girl and that I was the first dark-skinned girl they actually dated on a serious level. I was happy but confused at the same time because my color is beautiful.

Another thing is body image in the modeling industry. They [modeling agencies] want you to be SKINNY SKINNY SKINNY! Even smaller than me! When I first went to NY I started to think that I was big, that I shouldn't eat all the food I was eating, and that I needed to exercise more. From research I now know that it is a huge problem beyond the industry. I want people and young women to understand that being healthy isn't your size; it's about being able to function! I am glad to know that some shows are regulating that the models have to be a certain size (healthy size) to walk on the runway.



# WHY MY BLACK BODY MATTERS: TALE OF AN S-CURL AND SELF-WORTH

**KENNETH PASS**

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I was in the sixth grade when I received my first S-Curl. I bought it with my allowance and rushed home through the cornfield and across the creek behind my house, anticipating the soft, spinning waves that would roll across my freshly faded head. My sister applied the cream and I endured approximately eight to nine minutes of hell in order to achieve my desired wave pattern. After rinsing and allowing my hair to dry, I emerged with what my classmates, friends and family saw as "good hair." I repeated this process again a few months later and, unfortunately, to my surprise I emerged with what they would call "chemical burns."

These moments in my life were in the making since I was born and unknowingly internalized the colorist ideologies that my family taught me about my skin and hair. My family and peers put a premium on whiteness – the adopted realities of past generations – and it caused us to do things with our bodies and our hair so that we could reach even a small threshold of what that whiteness could be.

For my family, it meant not enjoying the sun to avoid getting darker, pinching children's noses so they could grow to be slender and petite, and texturizing our hair so it would not be nappy and coarse. Like the chemical burns that scabbed my head and left their misshapen marks on my scalp, my family and I felt discontented and suffered "burns" about what it meant to be a person of color in the world. Those burns are still healing.

Those generational scars helped me to realize that Black people, in some ways, aspire to be White. Black folks have learned, since the beginning of colonization, that our skin, bodies, hair and culture were things to be repulsed and done away with. We learned it during slavery when we were implicitly and explicitly taught that house slaves and those who were to receive better treatment while in captivity were to have a lighter complexion. These teachings have manifested themselves in "paper-bag" and "fine-tooth comb" tests for entrance into Black fraternities and a surge in the skin bleaching product market and advertising in some African countries.

These teachings look like Hampton University's five-year Masters of Business Administration program banning cornrows, dreads and other Afrocentric hairstyles. They look like the photos, which line the

Kilgore Student Center, of the consecutive years of longhaired and light-skinned Miss Maroon and Whites. They look like Morehouse students rejecting ideas of collectivism. They look like my experiences getting an S-Curl.

And they look like the systemic violence that occurred towards: Trayvon Martin; Sarah Baartman, the African woman who was a freak show attraction in 19th century Europe; Harriet Jacobs, who escaped slavery after hiding out for seven years; and Jonathan Ferrell, the unarmed black man who was shot 10 times and killed by an officer in Charlotte, NC, two months ago as Ferrell sought aid after a car accident.

These ideologies have grown old with age, and we still find ourselves grappling with the idea that our Black bodies, our hair, our culture are worthy of life and affirmation, and they have led me to an "if only" space. "If only" I was this and "if only" I was that: I could get a boyfriend; I would not be followed in the store; I could be loved.

Black aspirations to whiteness are deeper than just the desire for white skin and fine hair, but are the willingness to trade and shame African Diaspora culture for European Diaspora culture. Albeit, my paradigm has shifted after years of reflecting, having people enter my life who have told me that I am valued merely because "I am," and learning about the innate worth of my community. I now use these aforementioned examples to give credence to why my Black body and my tight-curled, kinky hair matter, and how they help to lead a revolution that recognizes that we can encourage many ways of being in the world.

I, and others alike, have been able to carve out spaces and work to undo colorist and racist conceptions of hair, bodies and culture. We have allowed ourselves to believe that we are worthy of sustained love that recognizes the black color of our hair, the various curves of our noses, the brown, ebony and mahogany tones of our skin, and the ways we dance, sing, speak and write.

We have denied the former misunderstandings of what it means to be Black in the world and are rising towards liberation. We have worked with and taught each other, and those around us, that no matter who or what one is, that person is important to the collective.

Through and with these people, I have learned that Black people are worthy and that our blackness, no matter what it looks like, is indeed beautiful.



## BEING AN UNAPOLOGETICALLY BALD WOMAN

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I am Ariana Brazier, a sophomore English major from Bessemer, Ala., and I was recently asked why my beauty is unique and some of the challenges I have faced regarding my beauty. I replied that my beauty is unique for numerous reasons. I am mainly Black and Filipino, though there are a number of other ethnicities that make up my family history. In addition to being extremely proud of my mixed heritage, I have Alopecia. Alopecia is a hereditary autoimmune disorder that causes hair loss. Through this disorder, I have come to embrace my beauty for what it is and what it is not.

I have faced many challenges throughout my life. Being racially ambiguous and bald (often without eye brows and eye lashes) tends to make people curious or uncomfortable. Although I have been discriminated against because of my color, the biggest challenge has been the sympathy people are so quick to show towards a bald, young woman. I am not sick, I will not wear a wig, and I am not sorry that I am bald. When I look in the mirror, I see beauty and confidence when my smile is genuine, but I also see insecurity and doubt when I compare my beauty to someone else's, which is a similar feeling many people face on a regular basis.

However, at some point everyone must realize that each person exhibits his or her own, incomparable beauty. My understanding of beauty, in particular, has developed as a result of personal experiences. I believe that a person emanates beauty when he or she walks with confidence and purpose. A beautiful person is the proud owner of a precious and infectious smile.

Honestly, when I think of all of the beautiful people I know, I think of how they've made me feel. I think of their optimistic view of the world and the manner in which they evoke excitement from others. They are naturally supportive and uplifting because of the genuineness of their character. These beautiful people have insecurities, but they are always themselves and always laughing. The beauty is in the way they inspire other people by simply living their lives.

I affirm my beauty by striving to be a beautiful person strictly according to my own definition of beauty. I seek to use the confidence that has developed as a result of living out my definition of beauty to inspire others to embrace their own beauty.

## THE ABSENCE OF RADICAL SELF-LOVE AMID A WELLNESS REVOLUTION

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Radical self-love is the core of holistic beauty. It is the realization that the embodiment of love is inseparable from the self. Radical behavior addresses the systemic rather than isolated instances that allow us to understand a phenomena.

For centuries, black women have served as primary caregivers for others while placing our wellness on the back burner. As the Wellness Revolution emphasizes, taking care of ourselves disrupts the structural and political paradigms that devalue our humanity and render us disposable.

When we are inadequate in self-care, we simply affirm the social order that devalues our existence. We must be strategic against a system that insists we perish. Sister Warrior Audre Lourde once said, "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare." It is a costly performance to be a "strong" black woman, considering our bodies exclusively bear the costs.

We are tired of bending to tiresome tropes, yet we are weary of standing against them.

Instead of viewing self-love through the limited view of physical wellness, we will gain much more through a kaleidoscopic approach with appreciation of self at its core?

The media starves us of images of women of color that directly reflect self-love. Self-love cannot exist in a space where women are unable to separate themselves from a misogynist culture counterintuitive to women's empowerment. Self-love will not exist in a space where educated women are unable to holistically deconstruct tropes of blackness. Self-love is unable to thrive in spaces where ideals of colonizers still influence our conceptions of beauty and color.

How can we oversimplify wellness to physical appearance? Emphasizing

cosmetic appearance creates hostility and judgment among those that are othered by that norm. Radical self-love is desperately absent from Spelman's campus. This absence inhibits our ability to confront the depression and alienation that occurs on the margins of dominant social culture. Black feminists have realized this, but in the context of Spelman College, a space of high education exclusively for women of African descent, that identity is rarely celebrated.

Self-realization and self-appreciation are central to discourses of black feminism. As black feminists, we realize the discourse of power imbedded in the language of white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy (yet sometimes adapted by black men as well). Even in the marginalization of our narratives, we find space and solidarity with each other. Historically, black women have reaffirmed our glory even in absence from the public sphere, yet is that visible in our campus culture?

The caveat: Radical self-love is inextricable from self-care. While loving ourselves so greatly and authentically, we come to understand the needs of our bodies. Therefore, we are more inclined to take care of the body: spiritually, emotionally, physically, and mentally.

How can we equate wellness with physical health? Wellness is holistic; wellness is found in radical self-love, embracing the soul of the body as the source of happiness, rather than the appearance of the body itself. Once we reach radical self-love, we will realize our bodies are temples and grounds to be worshipped, we will deeply consider what (and who) we allow into our bodies.

Radical self-love places us in conversations where our bodies are subjects of celebration rather than objects of scrutiny and disdain. We become subjects of self-care rather than objects of destructive gazes concerning our choices and well-being. Radical self-love is the only means by which we may achieve social freedom.



# IN LIVING COLOR: TWO FRIENDS REFLECT ON THEIR SKIN

Amid continuing debates about the role skin color plays in social status, two great friends share their personal stories on skin politics as women of color in various spaces.

## IVY HARRIS

My encounters with colorism have made me realize that there is a problem among black women and self-identity. This summer, while interning at a pre-school in Atlanta, I asked the African American girls in my class why they didn't play with the black dolls. They always responded with, "She's too black, her hair is nappy." I believe that it is essential for black mothers to raise their daughters with black dolls and constantly tell them how beautiful they are. Even more so, we are in a society where black rappers always reference light skinned girls as being beautiful and only show light skinned models in their music videos. We as black women identify with conforming to the ideals of a Eurocentric society. We have to learn to embrace our hair, skin color, and bodies at an early age.

The negative effects of colorism are prevalent throughout my family and city history. I am from New Orleans, a city with a constant feud between light-skinned vs. dark-skinned. My creole grandmother moved to California during the 1960s and chose not to take my mother with her because she was too dark skinned. My grandmother believed in *Passé Blanc*, which is a creole term for "passing for white." There are also family members who have told me I will never fully be accepted because I have a different skin tone from them. When I was younger these harsh words from my family made me feel rejected and



disconnected from them. As a result, I longed to have a big and close family of my own one-day. Even under these previous circumstances I have learned to appreciate my skin color.

Now that I am older I realized that my families mindset was an attempt by those affected directly by oppression from racism to disassociate themselves from their own people.

## ADEERYA JOHNSON

As a light-skinned woman, I'm referred to as light bright, white chocolate, red bone, and many other names. Being a light-skinned woman, some people may think that I have a better chance with guys or receive more attention. However, at times I feel that because of my locs I may not get the same attention or be classified as beautiful or sexy because I am not the ideal light-skinned woman who has long straight hair with bodacious curves. In addition, I tend to doubt myself for not being dark enough because I am so light-skinned. There are cases where I believe that in order to be a beautiful "Black" woman I have to have beautiful chocolate skin.

However, I accept my color by embracing my locs—it keeps me true to who I am and allows me to express myself, my mind, and my body through my hair. I feel that my locs actually help bring out the color of my skin and gives me my own personal perception of beauty, which is natural. I am proud of the skin I'm in and I love myself just the way I am. They may say the darker the berry the sweeter the juice, but my black will always be beautiful.

# MY BODY AND SPIRITUALITY

## IMANI JOHNSON

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I have always carried some sort of envy toward those who were relatively more popular than me. I wanted all of the attention that they were getting because I never thought I was good enough.

I have and sometimes still do struggle with my body image. I've always had an athletic build, but it was never where I thought it needed to be. I wanted it to be like the lean fit athletes, with toned muscles and flat stomachs; what I viewed as perfect figures. I didn't truly want any of those things for me and for the betterment of myself.

Nevertheless I had to accept who I was because nothing would change substantially in one day, so why fret? Those and a combination of others issues I was facing turned into a spiritual, emotional, and physical journey. I was on a path to accepting myself as a whole individual, embracing who I am naturally, and recognizing my worth.

Raised in the church, God had always been a part of my life. When I came to college, I embarked on a journey to find him for myself. In adolescence we're somewhat forced to attend church, sing in a choir, or go to Bible study. It was time for me to create a relationship with him on my own terms. That took me nearly two years.

Keeping God as a regular portion of my daily life has allowed so many of the things I've tried to do without him to fall into place. I smile so much more; it's hard to find me without a smile on my face. I am eating well, fasting regularly helps a lot, and I also work out frequently. Though I do have my rough days, I am truly a joyous person and I can without a doubt say that I am content with my life.

I came to college struggling with my physical appearance. Wondering what people thought of me used to consume my daily thought process. I wasn't able to focus on the things that really mattered. My confidence was low and I never believed in the potential that so many said I have. All of these things had me broken down, stressed out, and crying way too much. I cried out to God for help because I knew that I was at a destructive place in my life and I needed to get out.

Sooner than later, he began placing people in my life who would slowly but surely help me out of my rut. A quick shout out to Mary Welcome, Jaikenah Brown, Monica Legall, Kirstyn Smith, Jasmine Colvin, DeShaun Bennett, David Agumya, Travon Jackson, Dr. Juanchella Francis, Dr. DeKimberlen Neel, and Dean Kimberly Ferguson for consistently being there for me the last two years and pulling me out of my rut. I love you! – I truly love me now. I am by no means perfect so I will continue to work on myself; there is always room for improvement.

I recently spoke with Dr. Jane Smith at Spelman College. She is the director of the Center of Leadership and Civic Engagement (LEADS), former President and CEO of the National Council of Negro Women, and the previous CEO of Business and Professional Women/USA.

She adorned me with compliments on how my look was just for me and how it worked so well; pointing out my unique hairline all the way down to my drawn-out sideburns. I may have come a long ways from constantly thinking how I looked wasn't good, right or enough, but a genuine compliment from an esteemed individual still goes a long way and reassures my self-worth.

So many young black women and young black girls battle with self-esteem issues, and while it is not their job solely, I feel that a role of professional women is to help build up young girls and women's confidence. With so many people focusing on the insignificant negative aspects of someone, in the midst of all of the positive, it is hard for people to truly appreciate the little things that make them unique and beautiful.

Smith is an accomplished respected professional who I hardly knew before our conversation. We sat down in her office, and she just began telling me I was beautiful. The compliments did not "blow my head up" or inflate my ego, but they made me feel good on the inside. They were genuine and I believed her.

A problem that exists in the black community, and largely in the population of black women, is that we are afraid to be kind. We don't uplift each other and compliment each other just because. Compliments can make a difference in a people's mental health. If they're walking around depressed and feeling ugly or fat, a simple comment praising their outfit or their hair can make all the difference. Unexpected admiration lets people become aware of what they may be unable to see on their own.

The negative perceptions people had of me and the perceptions I had of myself used to go hand in hand. In high school, I was a full-out tomboy. I was called a lesbian, guys weren't interested in me, I wasn't a part of the in-crowd. I felt ugly and unwanted.

When my perspective began to change due to help from my church family, my friends, and personal introspection, I became so free. I realized I can only be me and no one else. I am beautiful and have so much to offer. God has created me in his own image; I have divinity in me and I am worthy.

The transformation from caring so much about what others thought of me to only caring slightly, and realizing that how I felt about myself was most important, allowed me to let go of so much of the unhealthy baggage I was carrying. Today, I embrace my flaws and look to only myself and God for validation. I am who I am with slight alterations to make. I love being me.

And to everyone who is reading this, here are some lessons that I have learned along my journey:

- I have to make an effort to change my outlook.
- Change will not happen by itself or in one day.
- I have to be patient to grow and mold into a healthier person.
- I have to love me before any one else can.
- ... You are closer to loving you, much closer than you think.



10

ARTS  
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# OBSSESSED.

## CELEBRITY BODY FIXATIONS & LOVING YOU!

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How many times have you heard those words, in some form, escape the mouths of young people in America, and specifically within the African-American community? With this heavily constructed ideal of "perfection" concocted with a substantial dose of media influence, both young women and men have adopted a mentality of bodily inadequacy that has only intensified as generations mature.

While this "La La Land" induced perception of the ultimate body keeps pervading the minds of America's youth, the reality of the situation slowly dissipates, causing them to forget that body image is a subjective part of human structure; no one is the same!

As generations come and go, the obsessive fascination with all things media climbs accordingly. The age of technology, reality TV, and celebrity culture continues to bombard the minds of Millennials (born between 1980 and 2000) on a daily basis, regardless of choice. Because this has become a custom of modern society, more and more emphasis is subsequently placed on physical ultimacy in relation to a singer, an actor/actress, a rapper, a model, a reality TV star, or any other Hollywood engrained individual who is shoved down the throats of the world's consumers.

Suddenly, once exposed to the plethora of conventionally – and often falsely – "glamorized" characters in the public eye, individuals begin to highlight bodily imperfections that they didn't even know they had. In no time at all, nothing seems good enough; asymmetrical features, less than "perfect" complexions, eyes that are not initially "light" in color, "inadequate" breast sizes, and wash basin as opposed to washboard stomachs are put on front street. But why do we look at celebrities as a rubric to desired physical perfection?

Living in a shallow and aesthetically driven society, the idea of image importance is often considered principal to all other admirable qualities humans should possess. Forget humility, compassion, and partnership. Look the part, and you'll make it in life! Right? If judging from the seemingly facile approaches of the Kim Kardashians and Basketball Wives of the world, achieving monetary success is as easy as having a tight body and fitting into the tightest body-con dresses one can find.

Don't think that the guys are exempt from this epidemic, either. A common misconception of body conformity is the false ideology that this complex is exclusively effective with women. It is no

secret that though males are less outwardly and emotionally expressive, they experience the same, if not larger quantities of insecurities than the opposite sex.

It is a cultural norm and a "coolin' " technique for guys to be nonchalant when it comes to their physiques, therefore pushing their genuine perceptions of their own bodies to the side to maintain an image of "cool." This, however, is beginning to disintegrate as advertisers and the media as a collective unit continue to turn their attention to young men as a lucrative demographic.

Most recently, the image of the physically built male with windswept hair, an angular jaw line, deep voice, tattoos, and a dreamy stare has been the staple for masculine perfection in movies, music, and magazine covers alike. One also cannot ignore the recent phenomenon that is the Shaun T Insanity and Hip-Hop abs workout series. Due to this outburst of societal pressure to become "swole," the playing field of who can look the best by society's standards between men and women is almost even.

The pressure is even further intensified when bimonthly covers of magazines and tabloids with bold headlines such as "The Sexiest Man/Woman Alive" or "Get A Body Like (insert celebrity name here)" are constantly staring you in the face with bold letters, inadvertently (or is it?) declaring that "you can't sit with us" disposition that today's society knows oh so well. And while people continue to psych themselves into believing that they are unbothered by these clever anecdotal strategies intended to promote self-loathing, they go on to subconsciously compare their bodies to those of often surgically enhanced and professionally trained celebrities.

Just think about it. When asked to describe someone you've seen recently, almost immediately, a subconsciously comparative temperament is applied: "He's got that Lance Gross complexion," or "She's got those lips like Angelina [Jolie]." Through these seemingly harmless and unrealistic comparisons, we continue to perpetuate a hierarchy of socially constructed physical superiority that many in society will fail to achieve unless given a one-way ticket to travel on the yellow brick road to Hollywood's magicians.

From models soaking cotton balls in orange juice for temporary appetite fulfillment (don't get any ideas), to everyday Instagram users depending on the savior of those infamous filters to achieve that "glowy" complexion, bodily insecurity is something that has a frighteningly tight grip on the lives of many. While fitness aspirations are a healthy part of human thought, physical comparisons to Hollywood's standards will prove to hurt you more than help you. So, embrace your authentic self, as that may ultimately be your ticket to lifelong fulfillment.

"Real beauty isn't about symmetry or weight or makeup; it's about looking life right in the face and seeing all its magnificence reflected in your own." – Valerie Monroe, O Magazine's beauty director.

**"IF I HAD BEYONCÉ'S HOURGLASS FIGURE, RIHANNA'S LEGS, NICKI'S BUTT AND MEGAN FOXX'S EYES, I'D BE PERFECT."**

## MUSIC MARKETABILITY: LESS REFORM, MORE REAL

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It used to be said that to be successful in mainstream media, a person had to have "the look." Consider the singing capabilities of Rihanna in comparison to those of Elle Varner and then consider which of them is more popular, accepted, and "marketable" to mainstream media. However, things are changing and now the focus seems to be on what a person has to offer than his or her style or crooked smile.

Just last year, fashion icon Karl Lagerfeld commented on his opinion of the music industry's lead prospects.

"The thing at the moment is Adele," he said. "She is a little too fat, but she has a beautiful face and a divine voice."

Adele responded respectfully, remarking that she loves how she looks and would never want to change her image:

"I've never wanted to look like models on the cover of magazines. I represent the majority of women and I'm very proud of that," she said, according to the U.K. edition of Marie Claire magazine.

"I actually prefer Adele, she is my favorite singer and I am

a great admirer of her," Lagerfeld later responded. "I lost over 30 kilos over 10 years ago and have kept it off. I know how it feels when the press is mean to you in regards to your appearance. Adele is a beautiful girl. She is the best. And I can't wait for her next CD."

Ditching many of those outdated and unrealistic standards of acceptability in the entertainment industry seems to be a new initiative of the people as more artists and personalities are being introduced and praised for their unconventional attributes. Short rappers with huge ears, curvy songstress with gaps in their teeth, for example, have become a significant part of society now than before. They now represent the billions of faces that support and love them and look just like them, telling them that despite what "flaws" they may have, they are still worthy and capable of attaining success.

Famous rapper J. Cole recently released a single from his latest album "Born Sinner" in which he discusses taboo topics such as physical acceptability in the entertainment industry as well as the importance of self-esteem and compassion for others. "Crooked Smile," featuring former TLC members Rozonda "Chilli" Thomas and Tionne "T-Boz" Watkins, is a track that embodies the essence of this new movement for less reform and more real.

"They tell me I should fix my grill cause I got money now / I ain't gon' sit around and front like I ain't thought about it / A perfect smile is more appealing but it's funny how / My s\*\*\* is crooked look at how far I done got without it," raps J. Cole at the beginning of the song, telling listeners a familiar story of an industry full of pressures and opinions pushing him (and presumably others) to alter their appearances. "I keep my twisted grill, just to show the kids it's real / We ain't picture perfect but we worth the picture still / I got smart, I got rich, and I got b\*\*\*\*s still / And they all look like my eyebrows: thick as hell," he continues.

No longer are Fantasia's full lips or Miguel's fair skin more of a factor in determining an artist's potential than his or her talent. The artists of today tell people to be themselves and reject ideas of change solely for acceptance. They tell their fans to wear clothes of the opposite sex, to get tattoos, and even to wear wigs and costumes if they like; they tell them that none of that matters when talent is present and to accentuate their "imperfections."

Whether inspired by the long flowing gold extensions worn by industry favorites like Beyoncé and Mariah Carey, or the more reserved, prim looks of Janelle Monáe and Chrissette Michele, be inspired to be an individual and wear your crooked smile in delight of it not being more important than what is inside.

## IT'S ALL IN YOUR HEAD

**AIN EALEY**

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The cookie cutter beauty standards that society inflicts on people are having an extreme effect on how we perceive our self-image. We are constantly attempting to mirror our looks off of personas that are not even true to the people who present them. The psychological effects that this method of beauty interpretation has on the general population are highly dysfunctional.

When people have a skewed and limited concept of what is appealing, we distort our bodies to those images. However, these unrealistic standards are not only damaging to the people who have to achieve these looks. They are also problematic for those who inflict the standards.

Focusing on the gender roles and patriarchal concepts of beauty that Black Americans often believe in, males also develop distorted ideas of what is attractive. It becomes restricted to the most perpetuated body features at the time: short, red bone, long hair, small waist, thick thighs, full buttocks and so on. This is not to insinuate that this makeup of bodily features is not attractive, but that it is often the most commonly associated with beauty.

So what does that mean for the billions of people who do not fit into the less than average beauty norm? They develop unnatural insecurities, dysfunctional behavior and a heightened sense of self-consciousness. Simultaneously, for the inflictors of this image, they are very seldom satisfied because the women they date or love are almost never the XXL men's magazine

cover beauties they are told to look for.

One may say that they are not actively enforcing these ideas of beauty or that they don't pay attention to them. However, we live in a society where we are constantly seeking the approval of our peers to substantiate our self-worth. That is why we buy those jeans and turn our backs to the mirror to see what everyone else will see. That is why we comment on every single female that walks by because a man is not a man if he doesn't point out a woman's rear end when she passes him. We do not have a liberated perception of beauty. We see ourselves through the heterosexual male gaze of both women and men of our society.

It is not a conscious effort, but simply an acquired custom. But what will happen if we no longer view ourselves through the societal gaze? What images will we see in the mirror and what rating would we give ourselves? Would there be a need to wonder if an outfit is fly based on how we think others will see it?

What about our "selfies?" – the photos we take of ourselves. Will they be taken to capture the moments instead of the most likes? Will the "perfect 10" have enough room to fit people with different shapes, sizes and hairstyles? Will you no longer feel obligated to participate in the obsessing over the black woman's body?

Oh yes, girls comment on each others bodies as well, but only because we carry the male gaze, holding our personal standards of each other through that of society. Let us create enough cookie cutters that will allow room for a diverse set of beauty standards.

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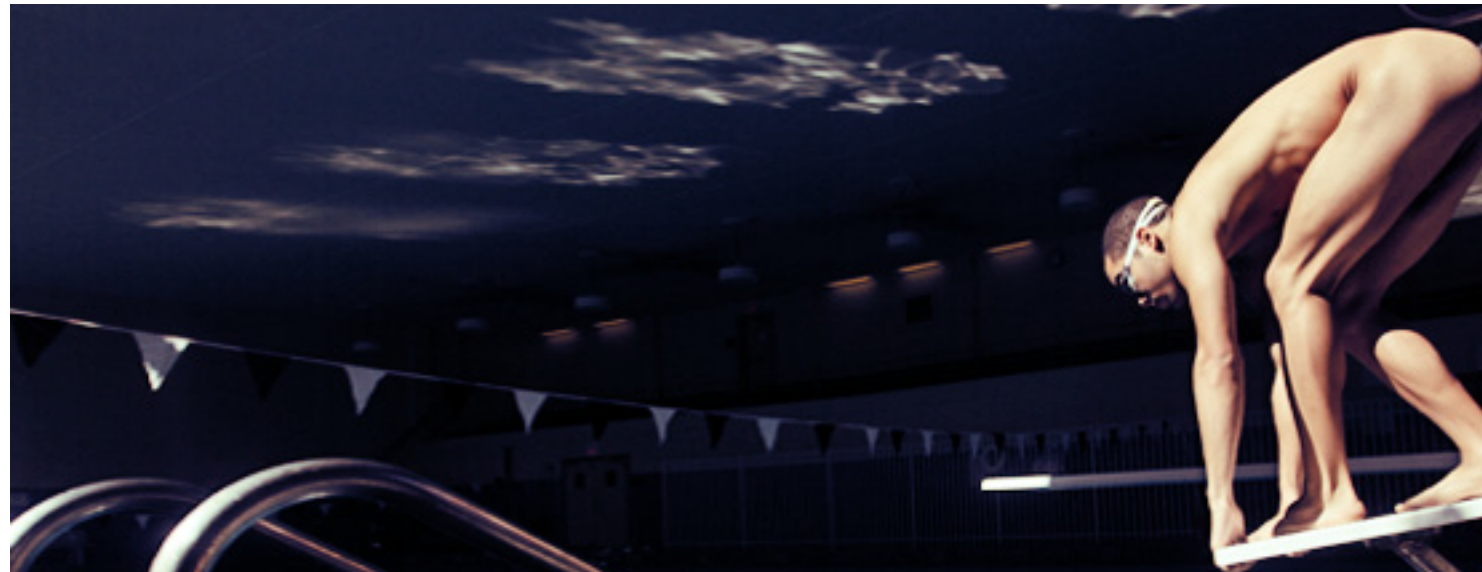
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ATHLETES TELL THEIR STORY

# COMING FROM A DARK PLACE; MY STRUGGLE WITH AN EATING DISORDER



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From 2009 to 2011, I had an eating disorder. At the time, I didn't recognize that what I was doing to myself was a serious problem. It took me two years to acknowledge and address my issues. I never sought therapy. I was never diagnosed. Instead, I adjusted the way I viewed my body and liberated myself from the darkest time in my life.

The struggle with my weight stemmed from an issue with my perception of my body. I despised what I saw in the mirror. My face, my arms, my legs, my height, nothing was good enough. I hated things about myself that I couldn't even change. In my mind, there was a mold and my body didn't fit into it. I was envious of the bodies I saw at swim meets. I wanted their 8-pack abs because my meager 6-pack wasn't good enough. I would compare myself to everyone I saw, and it only lowered my own self-esteem.

I started monitoring my weight and diet during my junior year of high school. Weighing myself, measuring my waist, and calculating my body mass index (BMI) became weekly occurrences. Gaining a pound meant a day without eating. In just a year, I was eating under 1,000 calories a day and exercising excessively. Throughout high school, my habits kept me at a relatively normal weight. It wasn't until I arrived at Morehouse that I started losing an unhealthy amount of weight.

In August of my freshman year, I weighed a little more than 120 pounds. While my peers were gaining the

"freshman 15," I was losing it. I would go days without eating. I used the food in the cafeteria as justification for skipping three days of meals. By winter break of 2011, I had lost almost 20 pounds in 3-½ months. I was never aware that I was starving myself until my BMI read "Underweight. At risk for eating disorder. Please seek medical attention."

That winter break, I sat down and re-evaluated the way I viewed my body. I isolated myself and reached the root of my body image issues. It all came down to constantly comparing myself to others. Once I stopped doing that and accepted my body as my own, I was free.

For two years, I never perceived my habits as abnormal. In my mind, everyone watched his or her weight like I did. Everyone skipped meals. Everyone had something they wanted to change about themselves. The truth is, what I was doing wasn't normal at all.

Looking at me, it wasn't obvious that I was struggling with an eating disorder. As a swimmer, I was used to my body being on display. It seemed as if I had total confidence in my body. In actuality, I had effectively mastered exuding self-confidence while experiencing self-hatred. Ironically, I never got that elusive 8-pack. I never achieved the ideals I was starving myself for. During my quest for washboard abs, all I got was washboard ribs.

Maintaining a positive perception of my body is an ongoing struggle. I still see flaws in pictures of myself. I still want to change what I see in the mirror. However, I no longer hate my body or view myself as inadequate. I am emerging from that dark place in my life and coming to love my body more each day.

# INSIDE THE LOCKER ROOM [COLUMN]

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Insecurities dealing with appearance and one's body image have become very prevalent in our society. Height, weight, or race are all things that people get criticized for and judged by on a daily basis, which has caused an enormous amount of people to be unhappy with who they are.

These insecurities even affect activities that many might tend to overlook, such as sports. Many people may think that athletes don't suffer from insecurities about their bodies, but that is far from the truth. In fact, insecurities have caused a lot of athletes to quit their respective sports.

In April of 2013, personal care brand Dove did a study that showed that 60 percent of girls have quit a sport because of their looks and body. This alarming and sad statistic truly shows how common body issues are. These girls aren't quitting these sports because they're not good at them or just don't feel like playing them. For these numbers to improve, our society must stop making these girls believe that they have to look a certain way to be considered successful or pretty.

There are a significant amount of males who deal with the same issues. Because of stereotypical characteristics that have been placed on male athletes, many believe that they don't care about their appearance. However, a lot of male athletes develop insecurities, especially when it comes to the amount of attention they receive from their coach and the competitiveness of the weight room.

Andre Southern a junior Computer Science major at Morehouse College and a member of the Maroon Tiger baseball team, believes that height, weight, and body type are the primary reasons for insecurities in male athletes.

"I've personally never had any problems when it comes to being insecure, but I definitely have had teammates that did," Southern said. "I've seen plenty of guys miss out on positions because they were too big or not tall enough. That's just how it is."

Southern believes that losing playing time because of weight or height is unfortunate, but with the competitive nature in sports he believes it's impossible to prevent.

Getting rid of insecurities in sports and society in general will be a tough task, but if self-confidence is instilled in children at a young age, rates of insecurities can surely be lowered.

# RUNNING TOWARD ACCEPTANCE

**The Maroon Tiger:** So talk a little bit about your history regarding body acceptance?

**Jai'us Ingram:** As a little boy I was always the smallest and skinniest person in my class compared to everyone else. There was never anyone close to my size so I always stuck out as being the kid that got picked on. My father told me when he was my age that he was the same size as me. I really didn't pay attention when he told me that. Instead, I would always say that I was going to be bigger than him.

**MT:** So you're an athlete, talk a little bit about how that started?

**Ji:** While in elementary school, I was always nervous to try out for any sports team due to my size and height and that affected me a lot. A lot of people used to call me a stick. I was too short to play basketball. Didn't play football in fear that I'd get broken in half.

**MT:** So where exactly did you fit in and when did it start?

**Ji:** One of my friends came up to me and asked why I never did track since I was really fast. So I ask my parents if I could join an AAU Team in Detroit.

**MT:** How was the first track meet?

**Ji:** My very first track and field meet was crazy. I was the smallest guy on the line at the 100meter dash as a sprinter and it was crazy. Once the starter shot the gun it was over for my opponents but I was really scared because everyone else was bigger than me. After a couple of months of running, I made it to the Junior Olympics and competed with runners from all over the world.

**MT:** How have you dealt with your own body politics as an athlete at Morehouse?

**Ji:** Since I have been at Morehouse I have had some difficulties with my size. This past summer, I really tried to get in the weight room and get bigger. I didn't achieve the success I had hoped for and I realized I needed to love who I am and love how God made me so that I could be happy with myself to achieve the things I want.

**MT:** What advice do you have for other athletes?

**Ji:** Accept who you are and love it because your body is your temple and you must take care of it.

