Some Suffer in Silence

As I scavenged through the kitchen for food, I heard my sister jumping in the living room. Once she made her way to where I stood, her face was blushed red. She gasped for air as she jumped towards the trash can.

"What are you doing," I asked, wondering why she was acting so strange.

"I'm doing jumping jacks to the trash can," she said with a forced smile.

"Why exactly?" I asked.

"Cuz dad told me to throw this away," she answered.

"Why the jumping tho?" I questioned.

"Because I want to..." as tears swelled up in her eyes, and she smiled, trying to fight them back.

"Mmk, but why do you want to exactly?"

"Because I- I just need to get in shape," she explained breathlessly.

I thought nothing of it. But later I discovered my little sister curled up in my father's arms crying. A girl from school told my sister, "dang girl, you need to work out," and this was a brutal punch to her mentally. She tried to brush it off. She wants to be accepted like all people. It's in our DNA to want love and acceptance. So because of this desire, she went home and started to furiously work out. She did jumping jacks and push ups for as long as she could. She did everything she physically could to burn calories and lose weight.

My little sister is seven years old, and she grew really fast between kindergarten and 1st grade. Because of her sudden growth spurt, she has some trouble coordinating her larger body. And she is self-conscious of this. She doesn't fit in with most other girls her age and is socially

awkward. Because of this, she is excluded and criticised by her peers. These factors drove her to starve herself to lose weight.

"I don't want to eat because I don't want to be fat," she complained.

"You have to eat, it's unhealthy to starve yourself," I scolded.

"I don't want to. I don't even like food. It makes me feel sick," she whined.

"I don't care, you're gonna eat because you haven't eaten," I said sternly.

This is wrong. She is seven years old, and she should not believe that it's ok to starve herself. She should not feel the need to physically harm her body to be accepted by her peers. She does not need a perfect body. She is seven years old! She is supposed to live her life care free, not ashamed of her body and ashamed of who she is. These unrealistic standards and expectations are a crime against humanity.

We harm one another and believe that it's ok because we have been brought up to believe it's normal. This is not normal. Normal isn't allowing a seven year old girl to starve herself. Nor is it allowing her peers to tear her to pieces because she is built differently than others. These social pressures are what help contribute to different eating disorders, like anorexia, binge and barf, weight loss pill use, steroids, and many others.

In today's society it is harder than ever for our children to grow up because of the challenges society has given them. We teach them that their appearance is everything. Because of this we are causing our children to become depressed and not accept themselves for who they are. This is our problem.

Because we are told that how we look is everything, we try to change our appearance to match the high standards society holds for us. We try to change who we are to impress others. We try to meet the high expectations we set for ourselves that are based on what society considers attractive. What we have been taught as the template for the "perfect body." For a guy it's a large back, small waist, and defined muscles. For a girl it is an hourglass body; medium hips, small waist, medium upper torso. These are non realistic goals because we are all built differently. But this standard of an ideal body is what we are brought up with. The attractive are praised and all "flaws" are unacceptable. This is affecting everyone, people of all ages.

We all judge ourselves to harshly. We don't accept ourselves for who we are. We tend to hate ourselves because of the stereotypes society has placed upon us. And when we meet the expectations of today's society we lose ourselves. We become robots who follow the high master's orders. We were made to stand out, we were made to be unique. And because of the pressure we receive from others to be untrue to ourselves, we lose ourselves. People tend to change themselves through plastic surgery, through weight loss plans, and starving themselves. Some people risk their lives to meet the unrealistic measures of becoming aesthetically pleasing to others. We do this instead of trying to please ourselves.

This is what we are teaching future generations. That the way to be loved and accepted is through eating disorders, anorexia, etc. This is the reason why we have so many people depressed, unhappy, and with low self esteem. We are teaching our children that they are not enough. That they will never be enough. That the only thing that matters is the way a person looks. Not their true character. We are setting up future generations for misery and failure.

In our teenage years we tend to fall into peer pressure. We try our hardest to fit in and be accepted with everyone. These are the hardest years because they are our most vulnerable years. At the same time, thoughts that have been engraved into our minds throughout our lives are the saddest ones. The thought that we are never enough and that we will never be enough. We are too ugly and we don't have the correct body. We don't meet expectations of beauty from society. We are not attractive, and we are never going to be noticed. That we are never going to be loved. From a young age, we compare ourselves to others. Others that we wish we looked like, but we will never look like. And because we don't, it causes us to hate and dislike ourselves more than before.

This happens to everyone. Because of these societal messages, we tend to hate ourselves and it's sad. We put on a brave face to hide our true feelings because we are too scared to admit that we are unhappy with the way we look. We wish we looked like someone else or even were someone else because that is the pressure we are brought up with. It's normal to wish you were someone else if you aren't happy with yourself.

And I am no different. I have been beaten down by my peers. I have been physically and verbally abused. I have been told I was ugly, worthless, and worse. I was told that I should go die because I mean nothing and nobody wants me around. That nobody will ever love me.

This happens to a lot of people besides me. We have all been bullied, broken, hurt, and damaged. This is a sad fact of what's happening to us. We want to drag people down into the pool while our lungs are filling up with the pain and sorrows that we have faced. And unfortunately I am not innocent of wishing I was more attractive, or wanting to be considered beautiful by others. I have wished I was someone else because I have been deemed as ugly

before. We tear ourselves down. And others help contribute to our downward spiral of self destruction.

Yet, I have also been told I am beautiful, attractive, and kind. But I still doubt myself. I still beat myself down. I tell myself I am too fat, that I am ugly, and that I am worthless. But the people around me don't know it's happening. They don't know that I feel like I'm drowning and there is nobody there to save me. That I am dying behind a smile that I put up as a front. Because if I let out how I truly feel, I am afraid that I will be labeled as weak and as a baby. So I put up my act and allow people to think I am happy. That I am happy with how I look and how I am. But the truth is that I'm not.

I thought that I was the only one who thought like this. The only one who is drowning. But as I listened to the people around me, really listened to their problems, I began to learn that we all feel like this. And it's not only happening to teenagers. It happens to adults and children. Can you believe our children are feeling this way?

We all mask ourselves and put up a shield to protect our hearts. But the thing that sets us apart from all others, the thing that truly makes us beautiful, is our character. This is what truly matters. The people who change the world are the ones who have the strongest character, the ones who care about others. Not the ones who look a certain way to meet our societal expectations of beautiful.

The happiest people are the ones who are comfortable in their own skin. So be part of the solution. Be the good in the world. Show others that they matter, that they have a role in your life. Complements are a great way to do this. Show others that they truly are attractive. Tell them about their amazing qualities. Even the smallest complement can turn someone's day around.