Flat is still fat

Diet culture supports unhealthy eating habits

By Layla East

When I was 10, I was relatively happy with my body. I didn't pay much attention to it. Then my family adopted a diet. The diet revolved around "clean eating." No meat, no dairy, only greens. That in itself isn't damaging, but the messages the diet sent were. It told me "these foods are good and these ones are bad," and "you won't be happy if you're slightly overweight."

Along with the diets putting negative ideas in my mind, so did the adults in my life. Any time they ate carbs or some sort of treat they would say, "Oh, I'm being so bad." All the while, I dug into whatever treat was offered.

I would hear them shaming their bodies, commenting on how "fat and ugly" they were. The messages these diets were sending impacted the adults around me, so I started to pick up their habits. I started to pay attention to my body, examining it. And I didn't like what I saw.

This led to me pushing my shirt up one day to reveal my stomach with a pair of safety scissors resting on it. I stared at myself in my bedroom mirror. I wanted to cut it off, I needed it to be flat.

I spent my recesses in 5th grade working out. Not running around and playing, but following an exercise routine I created with my best friend.

The way I viewed food was distorted. Food was no longer fuel, but currency. I associated food with guilt. That all stems from diet culture.

Diet culture's goal isn't to help you get healthy. Its goal is to sell diet plans and pills to insecure people. They prey on insecurities, promising to rid you of what you're most self conscious about. Because of their outrageous promises, they give unhealthy diet tips.

They promote dangerous eating habits, the most egregious one being fasting, essentially starving in disguise. They promote counting every calorie, stating you should use them wisely because you only have so many each day. They promote ignoring hunger urges, urging you to just chug water instead.

Everything is about control. It isn't shocking that diet culture can lead to disordered eating. Restrictive eating disorders are all about control. The line between restrictive dieting and eating disorders is almost non-existent.

According to The National Eating Disorders Association, 35% of "normal dieters" progress to pathological dieting and 20-25% of those people develop eating disorders.

In the past couple of years, our social culture has shifted to body positivity and diet culture has decided to join in. Now their messages are filled with mantras on self confidence but still encourage you to not be satisfied by how you look.

Listen to your body, starve yourself, love your body the way it is, don't eat breakfast, breakfast is the most important meal of the day, food is fuel, food is guilt.

The whirlwind of thoughts is disorientating.

Diet culture's grotesque fascination with being perfect has ruined the way I, and many others, view food.

I never knew I would get to a point in my life where doing something as simple as eating would be laced with guilt. Diet culture not only promotes awful tips, but they are actively harmful. You don't have to experience it first hand to be affected by it.