

Creative Nonfiction: 309  
Dr. Dorris

# Semester Portfolio:

Personal Essay, Flash Nonfiction, Alternative Form, and Cultural Criticism

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## **Table of Contents**

Revision Essay ... 2

Workshop 1

    Original ... 5

    Revision ... 8

Flash Nonfiction Pieces ... 11

Workshop 2

    Original ... 14

    Revision ... 19

Cultural Criticism Piece ... 26

## Revision Essay

Over the semester in Creative Nonfiction, we have learned about craft and techniques for each of the forms of Creative Nonfiction including memoirs, flash nonfiction, cultural criticism essays, and alternative forms. Through weekly readings and exercises and the two major workshops we learned how to apply the craft to our own pieces of Creative Nonfiction. For this portfolio, I have included a personal essay, 3 pieces of flash nonfiction, an alternative form essay, and a cultural criticism essay. This semester, I decided to workshop my personal essay “A Side Effect of Growing Up” and my alternative form piece “Jessica’s Story: A Battle with the Twisted Lie of the Perfect Body.” Through these workshops, I received positive criticism from my classmates that helped me perfect these two pieces and improve my writing style in general. In this essay, I will discuss my revising process then the specific revisions I made to these two pieces.

For both workshop pieces, my revising process followed the same steps. Before the workshop I chose three troubles I was having with the piece and formed questions for my peers to focus their workshop comments on for that piece. After the workshop, I combined my own notes from the class discussion and all the comments I received and made a list of the top comments and ideas for revisions. From this list, I chose a few individual components of the essay I would do higher level revisions like reworking metaphors and meanings. Then, I moved on to stylistic revisions.

My first workshop piece, “A Side Effect of Growing Up,” is a personal essay that contemplates my relationship, and ultimately everyone’s relationship, with art and creativity as I grew up. For the piece, I focused my questions for revisions on the effectiveness of the digression I made in the beginning of the piece, the transitioning through tenses throughout the piece, and the ending of the piece including its deeper meaning and my Eden metaphor. The majority of the comments I received were based around my digression, conclusion, and pacing throughout certain parts of the piece. A lot of my classmates felt that my digression about the word “gaudy” needed to be connected more to the piece, so for my revision I focused on adding more of this. I did this by connecting my mother’s fear of “gaudy” to her loss of imagination and her conformity, with the addition of sentences like, “But, now that I’m older I understand. The world had already stolen her imagination, and as a slave to the conventional, she ran away from anything gaudy, hiding under a perfectly polished exterior.” The phrase “perfectly polished exterior” transitions back into my first memory of creation while my mother puts my hair into a “perfect pony.” I also connected back to the “gaudy digression” in my conclusion and explanation of the deeper meaning in the sentence, “Like my mother before me, I broke away from the gaudy clothing of expression and hid myself under modest outfits with neutral colors that refuse to turn the heads of my peers.”

Another smaller revision I made to the piece was to the pacing of the scenes between the opening and my current relationship to creation. I did this get to the “greater meaning” part of the piece faster. In addition to this, a lot of the comments suggested adding in another digression in the end for balance. I paired this revision with suggestions for my Eden metaphor because I received comments suggesting expanding on the metaphor in more detail. I combined these two

goals into another digression in the end of the piece where I explain our fear of creation as we get older within the metaphor of the garden of Eden. This not only fixed the issue of the ambiguity of the metaphor that some readers thought it had, but it also added more depth to the piece. After my revisions, I was very proud of both of these digressions, and I think I will definitely be using more digressions in future pieces because of the depth it gives to the piece.

My final major goal for the revision of my first workshop piece was adding more of the “greater meaning” to the piece in the conclusion. The Eden digression and the paragraphs before and after it were tweaked to added in a little more of this deeper meaning. I added in a part where I contemplate society’s standards of creation as a career and how this adds to our fear as we get older, concluding in the phrase, “As we transition into adulthood, we weigh our talent and rule out creation, even if we have a passion for it, because of these high standards formed through comparison.” I also added more comparison between my mother and me, and how age implies this change, writing “Like her, I too became afraid to make a mess as I grew up, afraid to use the creativity I was once so proud of. I compared my work to others, and this is when I began to fear my mistakes and confuse the true values of creation.” I think by adding more of this deeper meaning the reader can get more of the reason for why these memories are important to me and how they apply to their own life.

For my second workshop piece, the alternative form essay “Jessica’s Story: A Battle with the Twisted Lie of the Perfect Body,” I focused my workshop questions on the effectiveness of the images I chose, the metaphors within, and the ending to the piece. Because the piece is a both a way to tell my sisters story of her eating disorder, it is also a critique of society, so I was unsure about the ratio of the two parts. From the workshop comments I received, I got a lot of lower level revisions like changing the title, adding in a content warning, and slowing the pacing in certain areas, so I first made all of those changes. One of the largest revisions I made was to the area about Jessica’s recovery. I drew out the recovery and used a common pattern of the exchanges she made in order to heal like with the phrase, “The hours of arts and crafts replaced her long runs. The counseling was the antidote for the poison that had filled her brain with the lies of the perfect body.”

For the comments related to my questions, I received a lot of good feedback for the images. Some suggested changing a few of the images to be more realistic, some suggested switching placement of certain images, and others suggested tying the picture with the brain to the text more. I did this by connecting the part of the piece about recovery to poison and the brain with the phrase, “the antidote for the poison that had filled her brain with the lies of the perfect body.” I also switched out some of the more “cartoony” photos with more realistic ones, moved around some of the images in the first half of the piece, and added an image that mirrors the first picture in the piece but with bodies of all sizes.

As for the metaphors in the piece, a lot of my comments suggested adding a few common metaphors throughout to tie the piece together. I decided to revise by adding in more of the outlier metaphor and the poison metaphor throughout.

The biggest revisions I made to this piece were related to the ratio of Jessica’s story and the critique of society. Overall, I think I added a lot more detail in relation to Jessica’s own battle

like the details of her body before her battle with the eating disorder, how she achieved the weight loss, how she recovered, and what she learned from the experience. I also made the decision to only refer to her by her name when she was herself, before and after she was consumed by the “poison” of society. As for the critique, I also added a lot more to the ending of the piece. I tried to add the weight of the fact that she got help while others do not, the secrecy of the disease and the feeling of being an outlier, and the fault of society for the problem. I think by doing this, it connected to the reader more and instilled a greater message in their minds by tying her story directly to the problem.

In conclusion, I learned a lot from the workshopping process in this course, and I am confident that they have helped me become a better writer through the feedback I have received. I can see the improvements in the revisions I made including the development of ideas, connections, and metaphors with each piece. While we did not have the opportunity to continue our usual workshopping process in person this semester, I still enjoyed having the opportunity to read my classmate’s pieces and interact with them through the online platform.

## Workshop 1:

### A Side Effect of Growing Up: Workshop One Original

I was standing on the tacky yellow and white patterned linoleum kitchen floor of my old house with the quiet background noise of PBS cartoons playing in the living room for my younger sister. My mom had made me strip to just my underwear, in the fear of the brightly colored paint staining the light floral dress she had coaxed me into earlier that day. She was always worried about us making a mess or staining our clothes. Then, with my complaint, Mom ran a brush through my hair before she put it into a perfect ponytail, making sure there were no bumps.

I was about to paint with my older sister with a cheap art set she had gotten as a birthday gift. It was the kind of art set with the rainbow-colored mess of girls with brightly colored hair, ice cream cones, and inaccurate depictions of leopards and dolphins decorating the packaging. I had once asked my mother for a backpack and school supplies with the same pattern, when I was a few years older. She said, “well don’t you think that’s a little *gaudy*?”

Gaudy, she always used that word with the slightest tone of disgust in her voice. Whether it were bright clothing or glittery makeup, she always had an aversion to the flashy and the showy. When I was younger, I never understood this. I remember one time in particular we had been shopping all day, and I eventually found this swimming suit I absolutely adored. It was this one-piece swimming suit with the entire front covered in shiny material with a rainbow gradient pattern; it was exactly how I imagined mermaid scales to look. I was drawn to the glitter and wanted to see it shine in the summer sun, but when I asked her if I could get it, she offered me a light pink floral patterned one instead. “Isn’t this so much more...pretty?” I begged her for it, and with her dwindling patience after shopping with a four-year-old and an infant all day, she finally gave in. She couldn’t understand why I wanted it so badly, and I couldn’t understand how she didn’t see the beauty in it. But, now that I’m older I understand.

After she released me with my perfect ponytail pulling tightly at my temples, I impatiently began working. With my little hands, I grabbed the paint roller made of flimsy plastic and foam and dipped it into the hot pink paint. As I started rolling a big pink dolphin on the paper using a stencil, I heard mom impatiently call from the living room, “Be careful girls, make sure you don’t get it on the floor.” Her warning didn’t distract me from my work, I switched to yellow and grabbed the star stencil and began adding stars around the single dolphin in the middle of the page. I had no clear plan for the final product, I just started working and adding more as I went. As fearlessly I added to the page, I was too young to understand the effects of making a mess, and she was old enough to lose her creativity in the fear of messing up.

As I got older, my draw to creating grew stronger. In kindergarten class we’d always draw pictures to reflect after class activities, and I would always be so proud of my work when I brought it home to my parents. I remember one time in particular when I had drawn me and my friends on a fieldtrip to McDonald’s on M day. After finishing the drawing I was so excited to bring it home to my parents and watch them to tack it to the fridge with a magnet for the whole family to see. I remember my mother’s face when I showed her the picture after I got off the bus and ran to the screen door. When I finally showed her, her eyes got big at the sight of my masterpiece, matching the praise and excitement in her voice when she complimented my artistry. She encouraged me to keep drawing pictures like that one.

Looking back, the drawing wasn't any more than a cluster of orange scribbles in the shape of a lopsided circle with 4 brown lines waterfaling off the top on each side above a big blue triangle forming a dress to hold together the orange limbs stemming off the sides. Each of the shapes were scribbled on with patches of white peeking through. It was obvious that I had colored with a heavy hand because in random areas, chunks of the waxy crayon were stuck to the paper. In the corner, I drew a big yellow M for McDonalds with the rest of the word spelled wrong, but my letters were meticulously drawn. The "a" was started with nearly perfect circle but a few sizes too small, the tail, dipping just a little too low. While the picture was haphazard and sloppy, my mom treated it like an expensive work of art, and that warm encouragement pushed me to create more and more art during the next few years.

But as I got older my art received less positive reviews. While the quality had gotten a little better in the 3 years to third grade, my parents got progressively less and less excited when I brought home my art. Sure, it still earned its place on the fridge, but I didn't see the same excitement as I had with my kindergarten masterpieces. At the time, I believed I owed this to the sheer quantity of art I showed them. I thought that maybe, they had been tired of it, so I stopped the parading of all of my art to them. I reserved that for only the pieces I was truly proud of.

But this trend continued as I made my ascent into middle school. At this point, I had realized that my work wasn't as great as I had once believed; my work didn't add up to what I had seen from my peers who were truly talented. I remember the day I realized that I didn't have the gift. It was after the 6<sup>th</sup> grade art contest, and the teacher had just put the blue ribbon on the winning piece tacked to the wall of the hallway. The girl who had won's drawing was a self-portrait, and while she might have been super talented for our age, I was shocked at how realistic her person looked. After seeing this, I tried to draw myself like she had, but it ended up looking like all my other drawings. The biggest difference I found in our work was the face. While mine looked cartoonish, hers looked as if it could have been a real face. The eyes she had drawn had dimension on the paper, and the specks in her eyes had been translated been intricately draw in detail on the page as if the sunlight had been shining on them. I could never master the eyes. I realized there was just something she had that I didn't. This realization of the sophistication of the work of others, paired with the decreasing positive attention for my art led to my great disconnect with my creativity that only worsened with age.

Instead of going into a drawing with no plan like my younger self had, I began spending the majority of the time planning what it would be. Today, I still have this habit. When I paint, I spend half the time planning how I am going to use the canvas, rather than doing the painting itself. Once I finally figure out what the piece will be, I work up my confidence to put the first stroke on the canvas. I fear so greatly messing up that I doubt my own ability to create the simplest of things. I put so much weight on what the right thing to create is, that the act of creating became restrictive. Rather than being an outlet to express myself, it became a cemented drive for the perfect piece. What's good art is good, and what's bad is bad. Creation for me, no longer is about the joy of creating like with my first memory; it instead, is about the quality of the end product.

But, I can't be alone in this feeling. I think the small group of people who keep creating into adulthood are in the minority. When we were young, we didn't fear making mistakes, and we didn't over think anything because we hadn't yet had a reason to; it was Eden before the fall. But as we got older, we realized our nakedness. We realized our inherent gift or lack of gift existed

because we stopped receiving the same praise for our work. We compared our work to others, and this is when we began to fear our own mistakes and confuse the true values of creation. Like my mother before me, I too became afraid to make a mess as I grew up. My once careless drive to create was stolen by the fear of making a mess, a side effect of growing up.



## A Side Effect of Growing Up: Workshop One Revision

I was standing on the tacky yellow and white linoleum kitchen floor while the quiet background noise of PBS cartoons hummed from the living room. My mom had just made me strip to just my underwear, in the fear of the brightly colored paint staining the light floral dress she had coaxed me into earlier that day. She was always worried about us making a mess or staining our clothes. Then, with my complaint, Mom ran a brush through my hair before she put it into a perfect ponytail, making sure there were no bumps. I was about to paint with my older sister with a cheap art set she had gotten as a birthday gift. It was the kind of art set with the rainbow-colored mess of girls with brightly colored hair, ice cream cones, and inaccurate depictions of leopards and dolphins decorating the packaging. I had once asked my mother for a backpack and school supplies with the same pattern, when I was a few years older. She said, “well don’t you think that’s a little *gaudy*?”

Gaudy, she always used that word with the slightest tone of disgust in her voice. Whether it was bright clothing or glittery makeup, she always had an aversion to the flashy and the showy. When I was younger, I never understood this. I remember one time we had been shopping all day, and I eventually found this swimming suit I absolutely adored. It was this one-piece swimming suit with the entire front covered in shiny material with a rainbow gradient pattern; it was exactly how I imagined mermaid scales to look. I was drawn to the glitter and wanted to see it shine in the summer sun, but when I asked her if I could get it, she offered me a light pink floral patterned one instead. “Isn’t this so much more...pretty?” I begged her for it, and with her dwindling patience after shopping with a four-year-old and an infant all day, she finally gave in. She, like any other adult, couldn’t understand why I wanted it so badly, and I couldn’t understand how she didn’t see the beauty in it. But, now that I’m older I understand. The world had already stolen her imagination, and as a slave to the conventional, she ran away from anything gaudy, hiding under a perfectly polished exterior.

After she released me with my perfect ponytail pulling tightly at my temples, I impatiently began working. With my little hands, I grabbed the paint roller made of flimsy plastic and foam and dipped it into the hot pink paint. As I started rolling a big pink dolphin on the paper using a stencil, I heard mom impatiently call from the living room—while, I imagine, putting away my sisters toys or dusting the tv stand—“Be careful girls, make sure you don’t get it on the floor.” Her warning didn’t distract me from my work. I was used to her fear of all things messy—the chaos of creativity. I switched to yellow and grabbed the star stencil and began adding stars around the single dolphin in the middle of the page. I had no clear plan for the final product, I just started working and adding more as I went. As I fearlessly added to the page, I was too young to understand the effects of making a mess, and she was old enough to lose her creativity in the fear of messing up.

As I got older, my draw to creating grew stronger. In kindergarten class, I would always be so proud of my work when I brought it home to my parents for them to hang on the fridge. I remember one time I had drawn me and my friends on a fieldtrip to McDonald’s. I remember running off the bus and through the screen door, filled with excitement to show my mother. When I finally showed it to her, her eyes got big at the sight of my masterpiece, matching the praise and excitement in her voice when she complimented my artistry. She encouraged me to keep drawing pictures like that one.

Looking back, the drawing wasn't any more than a cluster of orange scribbles in the shape of a lopsided circle with 4 brown lines waterfalling off the circle on each side, making hair. The head was above a big blue triangle forming a dress to hold together the orange limbs stemming off the sides. Each of the shapes were scribbled on with patches of white peeking through. It was obvious that I had colored with a heavy hand because in random areas, chunks of the waxy crayon were stuck to the paper. In the corner, I drew a big yellow M for McDonalds with the rest of the word spelled wrong, but my letters were meticulously drawn. The "a" was started with a nearly perfect circle but a few sizes too small, and the tail, dipping just a little too low. While the picture was haphazard and sloppy—I was young, and my mom, the perfectionist she was, treated it like an expensive work of art. Her warm encouragement pushed me to create more and more art during the next few years.

But as I got older, my parents got progressively less and less excited when I brought home my art. Sure, it still earned its place on the fridge, but I didn't see the same excitement in third grade as I had with my kindergarten masterpieces. At the time, I believed I owed this to the sheer quantity of art I showed them. I thought that maybe they had been tired of it, so I stopped the parading all my art to them. I reserved that for only the pieces I was truly proud of.

But this trend continued as I made my ascent into middle school. At this point, I had realized that my work wasn't as great as I had once believed; my work didn't add up to what I had seen from my peers who were truly talented. I remember the day I realized that I didn't have the gift. It was after the 6<sup>th</sup> grade art contest when the teacher pinned the blue ribbon on the winning piece tacked to the wall of the hallway. The girl who had won's drawing was a self-portrait, and while she might have been super talented for our age, I was shocked at how realistic her person looked. After seeing this, I tried to draw myself like she had, mocking her technique, but it ended up looking like all my other drawings. The biggest difference I found in our work was the face. While mine looked cartoonish, hers looked as if it could have been a real face. The eyes she had drawn had dimension on the paper, and the specks in them had been intricately drawn were translated in detail on the page, as if the sunlight had been shining on them. I could never master the eyes. I realized there was just something she had that I didn't. This realization of the sophistication of the work of others, paired with the decreasing positive attention for my art led to a great disconnect with my creativity that only worsened with age.

Instead of going into a painting with no plan like my younger self had, I began spending the majority of the time planning what it would be. Today, I still have this habit. When I paint, I spend half the time planning how I am going to use the canvas, rather than doing the painting itself. Once I finally figure out what the piece will be, I work up my confidence to put the first stroke on the canvas. I fear so greatly messing up that I doubt my own ability to create the simplest of things. I put so much weight on what the right thing to create is, that the act of creating becomes restrictive. This fear mirrors my writing process as well. On countless occasions, I spend hours brainstorming ideas and planning, to just backspace my thoughts away when they finally reach the page. Rather than being an outlet to express myself, it became a cemented drive for the perfect piece. What's good art is good, and what's bad is bad. Creation for me, no longer is about the joy of creating like with my first memory; it instead, is about the quality of the end product. My values of creation were turned upside down by evil of comparison, leaving me in disarray.

But, I can't be alone in this feeling. I think the small group of people who keep creating into adulthood are in the minority. When we were young, we didn't fear making mistakes, and we didn't overthink anything because we hadn't yet had a reason to. As we grow older, we're forced to prioritize the skills we have to find work and be successful. Art is too often dismissed as a hobby—not a realistic path to follow—because of the high standards of talent society has put on creation. As we transition into adulthood, we weigh our talent and rule out creation, even if we have a passion for it, because of these high standards formed through comparison.

Our childhood passion to create was Eden before the fall. In the beginning, we lived our lives in a perfect paradise, with no worries of the mistakes we might make. Blinded from the worries our parents before us face. Like Eve, we faced no insecurities; we were in our most pure and naked form. But as we got older, we were exposed to the apple of knowledge, the evil of comparison. As we bit into the lies telling us we aren't good enough, we realized our nakedness and acknowledged our chance of failure. As adults, we no longer feel the excitement we once felt to share our work; instead, we hide from the vulnerability of exposing our art in its nakedness. We realized our inherent gift or lack of gift existed, and we emerged from the ignorant bliss of childhood. This knowledge was our own undoing, the fall of Eden.

Like my mother before me, I broke away from the gaudy clothing of expression and hid myself under modest outfits with neutral colors that refuse to turn the heads of my peers. Like her, I too became afraid to make a mess as I grew up, afraid to use the creativity I was once so proud of. I compared my work to others, and this is when I began to fear my mistakes and confuse the true values of creation. My once careless drive to create was stolen by the fear of making a mess, a side effect of growing up.

**Flash Nonfiction Pieces:****Broken**

The broken glass lies between us on the cold kitchen floor. Shattered in hundreds of jagged pieces, the clear barricade separates us. The cup had fallen in the background noise of one of the many arguments stemming from the inherent differences of mother and daughter. Her old wisdom and dogged opinions clashing with my young naïve masked with confidence more and more as grew older.

I had just told her something—the exact argument doesn’t stand out because it was among many of its kind. It could have been the time I told her I didn’t want to go to homecoming or when she told me I couldn’t go to the concert, or it was one of the countless other fights we had before. *You’ll understand when your older and I hope your kids are just as stubborn as you*, she would always say. This is how the fights always went. The importance here is that something happened that hadn’t ever before. An object stole the show. As the glass I had been putting away hit the floor, time stopped.

Like her temper, the glass was fragile, and with the subtlest of force, a brush of an arm or slip of the hand, it too plummeted to the floor. At just the moment, the thick wall of glass met the tile floor, its rigid crystalline structure impeded in on itself with nowhere to go, no room to move, crashing down. It shattered, adding chaos to the chaotic. Yet, our exchange of jarring words stopped, bringing peace, but it only for a moment.

Her words flew through the space between us like shards of glass, this time about another kind of carelessness. *You should have been more careful. Now, look at this mess. Be careful where you step. I didn’t mean to; it was an accident. I’ll clean it up.* We hadn’t been fighting about the glass itself; it was only a side effect of the greater problem, worsening the sting of a rocky relationship. But at that moment, it felt like the problem. We both could not put the pieces back together. To her, it was just another mess I had made for her to clean up, but I thought I was old enough to clean it up on my own.

But after the initial hurt, we swept up the pieces together. We found a way to mend a broken relationship. Sure, other glasses have fallen, and you never know when one might get bumped out of the messy cabinet, leaving another casualty. But somehow, we always figure out how to fix the messes we have made. While glass is fragile and can break with even the slightest of pressure, human relationships are built much stronger.

### A Faded Memory

My Grammy and Poppa always boast about how big their yard is whenever my cousins and I complain that there is nothing to do over the seeming endless hours of summer. The yard begins with the patio stemming off the backdoor, there are chairs circling the fireplace we'd sit around on cool nights while roasting marshmallows. My grandparents always share a bottle of wine with my aunts and uncles talking about something too grown-up for us kids to understand. My sisters and I always fight over who gets to sit on the swing. As I walk down the stairs of the patio, around me forms the breadth of their yard that is a huge L-shape that seems to stretch for miles. It is fenced in from the cars flying past on the other side. Their sound is muffled by the towering bushes that look like Christmas trees. In front of the trees are thousands of plants intricately spaced between lawn ornaments and steppingstones following the fence line to a bigger garden in the back corner of the yard. This is where my Grammy told me the fairies live. Apparently, they like the shade from the tall plants that form the walls of the forest, and they drink from the pond in the back. Walking out of the fairy's garden, I see the small plot of land that Grammy grows fruits and vegetables on as it sits in the hot beating sun of July. I hop on the railroad ties framing the patch and walk across like I'm a gymnast on a balance beam. I climb down into the patch to pick the strawberry growing beside me.

But the garden fades out of focus. I can't remember what other plants are growing there. I know from a picture that I once helped Grammy dig carrots out of the ground from the same patch, but I no longer can walk through that memory. As for the fairies' forest, I no longer hold the same awe and wonder for the creatures that I'd once sworn I'd seen while reading in the shade of the tall trellises wrapped with honeysuckle. But I'd image that the forest, like the trees would look much smaller now in real life, the great beauty and excitement of the fairy garden stollen by the passing of time. The huge yard seems much smaller now, as I visit only in my mind. The blurry edges remind me that soon the memory of the place will be unreachable in my memories like it is in real life.

## Home

After leaving home for my first year, being there really reminds me how much I should soak it in while I'm there. As I sit in the living room on a Saturday morning, I hear the coffee grinder going in the kitchen and feet coming down the stairs. I know those feet are my baby sisters by the cadence of her footfalls on the stair steps, young and upbeat. She plops on the black leather couch which is worn to gray in spots from both from the bright morning rays of sun from the east facing windows and its years of service cushioning our bodies. Like the couch our family has faced the wear and tear of the hard times but also the good times, and we have grown through it.

She sits at the other end of the couch from what is formally known as "Dad's seat". After long days of work to support our family, Dad comes home to sit in that seat every night and indulges in some well-earned time to relax. He is the foundation our family and has earned his own award of an honorary seat in our living room and the love and respect of his family for the sacrifices he makes for me, my mother, and my 4 siblings.

Above my sister's head, there are two sets of hanging picture frame arrangements on the wall. The oddity of this is that the picture frames have no pictures in them. They are left empty and have been left empty for the 5 years since they were put up—my mom "hasn't gotten around to put them up". From an outside perspective this display is probably hard to understand—a picture is meant to remind one of the memories they have made. But I argue no picture could ever capture the whole of a memory—it can only remind us of the memory. The absence of these pictures does not bother us because we don't need the reminders. The memories we make are lived in that room.

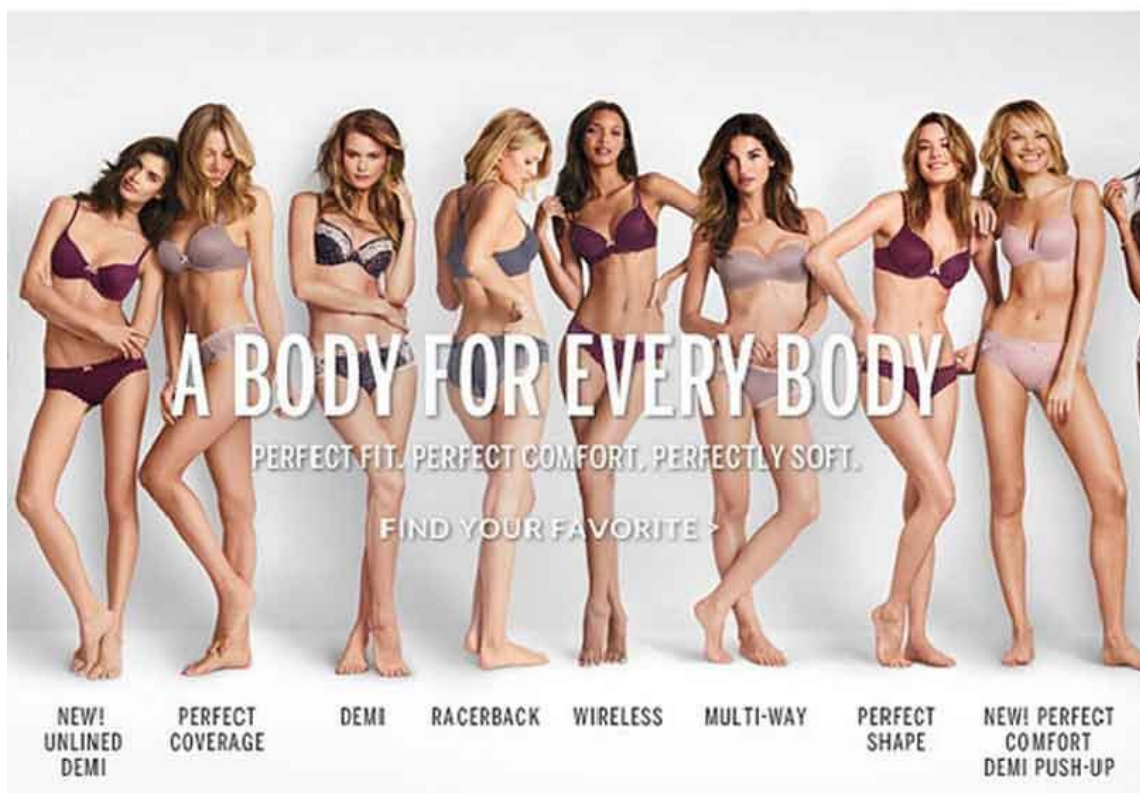
Because at the end of the day, the connections I have made in this world are all there is to live for. On my death bed I won't reminisce on the achievements I have made at work or the wealth I have gained. No, I will enjoy the memories I have made with the people I love the most, and what can bring me back to these memories is the place where they all took place.

## Workshop 2:

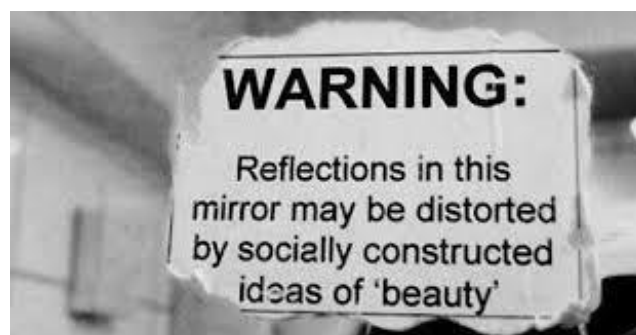
### The Problem of Society: Original

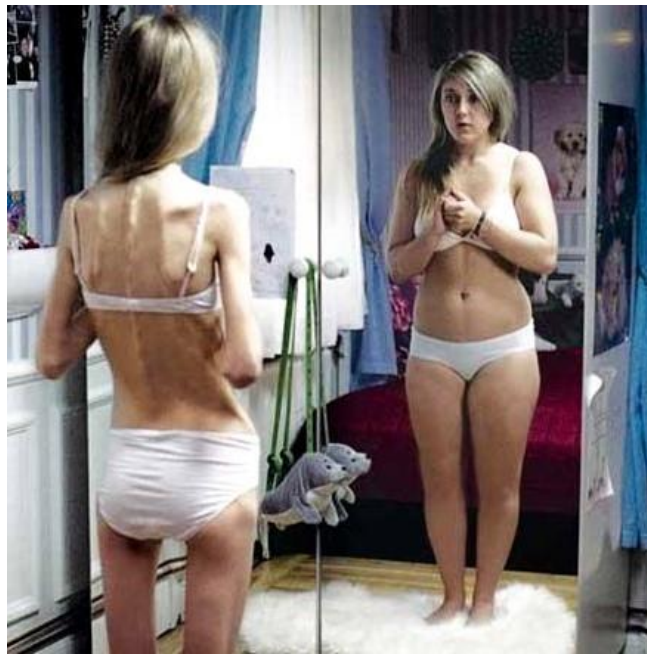
My sister paved the way before me. At 17, she showed my family the effects of a society, 12 years before today, that fed young girls the unmatched standards of a perfect body.

Magazine ads selling bras and underwear modeled women with waists small enough to hide behind a sheet of paper, held up by perfectly tanned legs that otherwise would be too fragile to support any other body. Almost ironically, their breasts were the only fat on their body, mismatched with their visible clavicle bones framing their chest, as if begging to take up space. A body that, while being realistically only achievable by the minority, is accepted as the standard of beauty.

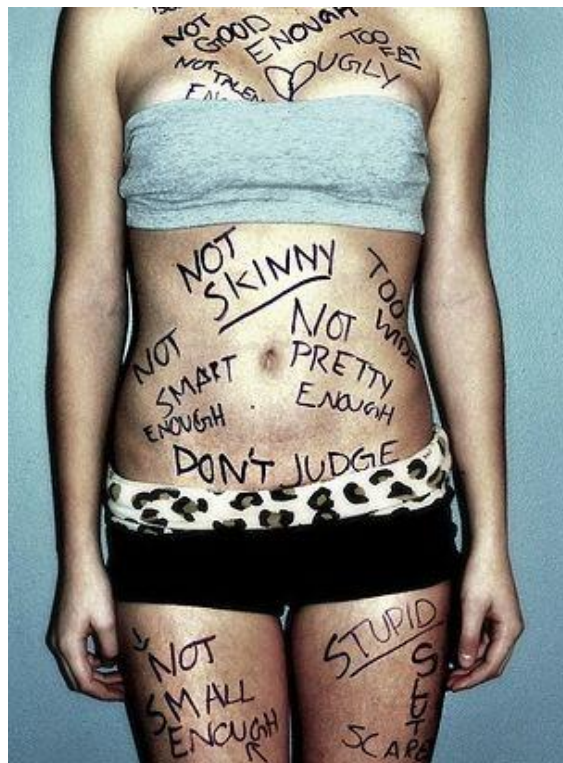


Fad diets and a passion for fitness, hid her attempt to achieve the ideal body at first. But her drive was far too strong; her self-control was unlike any other—she had it in her to meet these goals. With every look in the mirror, every check of her progress, she saw a different person looking back at her. Her fragile body accepted the lie of her reflection and absorbed it as fuel to push her harder, to limit herself more.





With everything in her, she wanted her own body, every cell of fat, to disappear. Every curve on her body, told her she was not beautiful; she wasn't like the girls in the magazine. She began to hate her own existence, the body that gave her life.





She paired these routine check-ups with the harsh feedback of the scale.

120

*It's time for a change.*

118

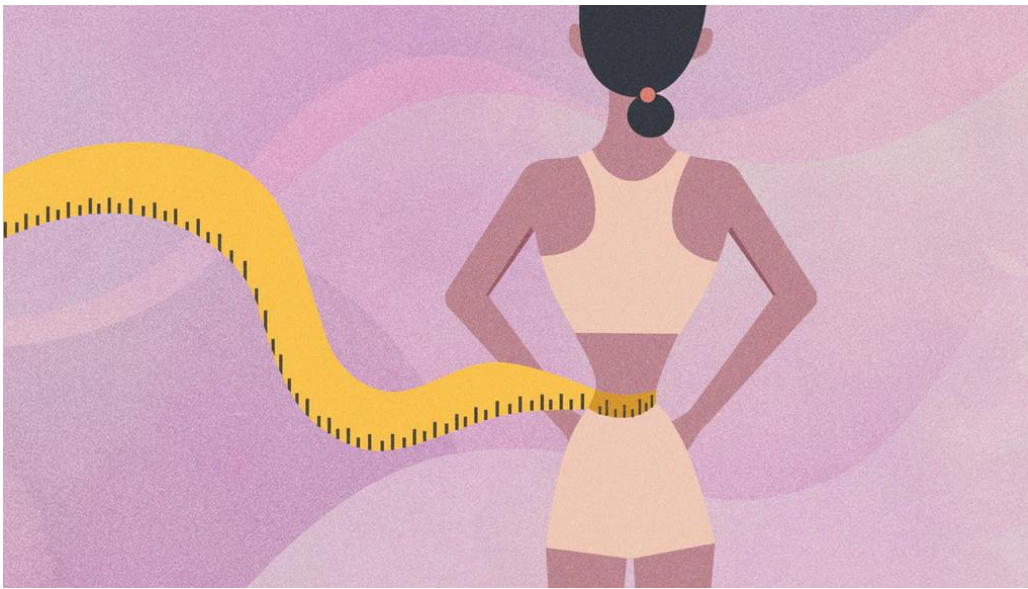
*Push harder. 4 more miles today.*

112

*Not enough.*

101

*Nothing tastes as good as skinny feels. Keep trying.*



She only made it so far before my parent's concern grew too strong. She couldn't trick them with an active lifestyle, anymore. They caught her just in time before she met her goal of fading out of existence. With time, she traded her counting of calories for counting hours in a hospital room, curing the effects of a twisted society with isolation. But she recovered. By starving herself of the lies she had been fed about the sick standards of beauty, she was able to find room for the food she so desperately needed.

~

But Jessica is not alone in these struggles, yet her story was hidden away, kept secret from the world. As if reminding her that she is an outlier, and that her difference is yet again a problem. Far too many girls face a similar story, hiding it away, as they too accepted the lies of our society as fact.



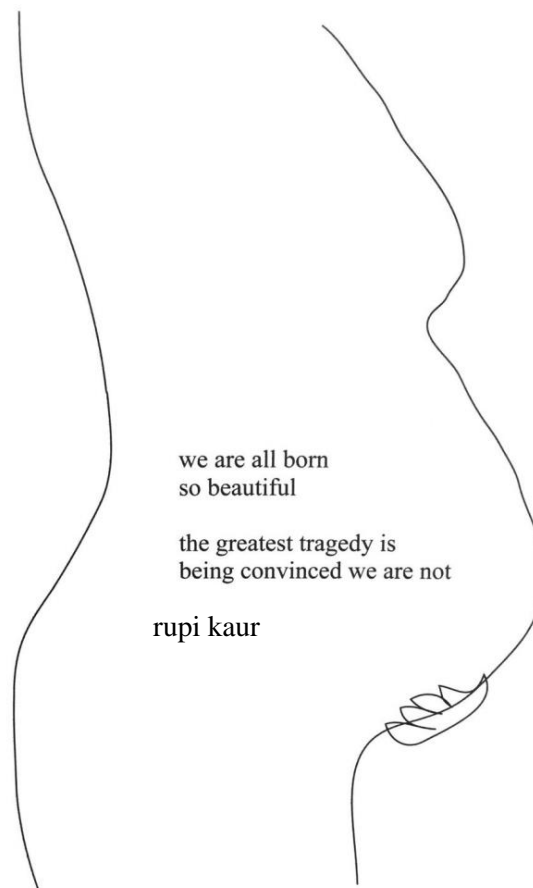
As time has passed though, our society has become more active at snuffing out the burn of these lies by showing the acceptance of every body through drawing on the beauty of our differences.



But there is still be work to be done. “Loving your body” is the simple fix that society offers, but there is a bigger problem at hand. Our society has become seemingly more accepting of the curves of women’s bodies, but it exchanged this with new standards to be met. Today’s “skinny”, is the perfect hourglass figure with an abnormally large butt paired with a non-existent waist. Woman’s body standards have been turned into the object of sex-appeal. Trading one set of unrealistic standards for the next in the attempt to please an audience, who hasn’t faced the harsh reality of beauty standards.



Growing up in the aftermath of my sister's story, my eyes have been opened to this evil, and I have learned how important it is to disregard the ideals women are constantly being fed by society. The only way to fight these standards is to instill in young girls that external beauty does not warrant our place in society. The number of your jean size or the shape of your body should not change one's self worth. We live in a society that tells women that their body is the problem, to hide that society itself, is the problem. As women we must do every thing we can to protect each other from the negative side effects of the problem of society.



we are all born  
so beautiful

the greatest tragedy is  
being convinced we are not

rupi kaur

### Jessica's Story: A Battle with the Twisted Lie of the Perfect Body: Revision

CW: eating disorders, suicide, body dysmorphia, beauty standards, body image

My sister paved the way before me. At 17, she showed my family the effects of a society, 12 years before today, that fed young girls the unmatched standards of a perfect body. While her body was already perfect, regardless of its shape, Jessica was small; she had an hourglass figure—a body many older women would spend months dieting and working out for. Before her battle with the twisted lie of society, she was already underweight, but this was just the beginning.

It was 2005. A time before Instagram and Snapchat, but there was a different form of media my sister was consumed by. Magazine and TV ads selling bras and underwear modeled women with waists small enough to hide behind a sheet of paper, held up by perfectly tanned legs that otherwise would be too fragile to support any larger of a body. Almost ironically, their breasts were the only fat they had—mismatching their visible clavicle bones framing them. The bones were begging to take up space, as if reminding us that women are meant to take up space. But only some of us are lucky enough to see this reality.

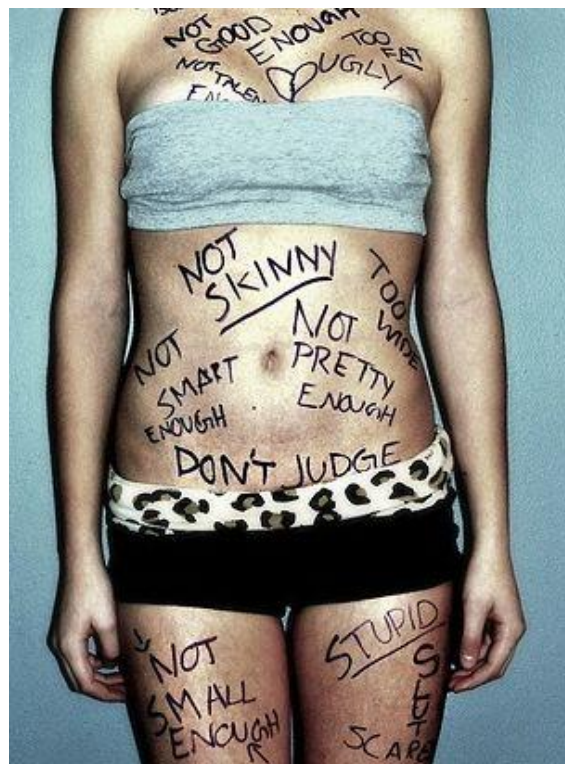
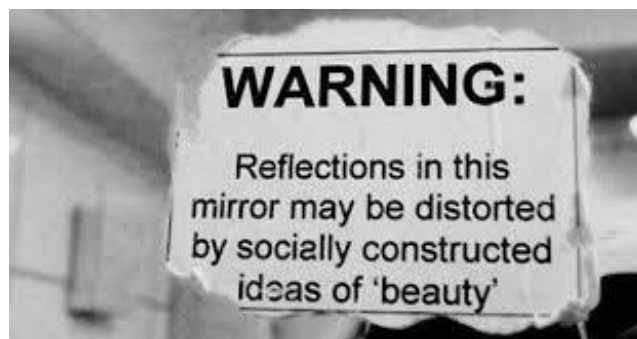


Although these models represented a body type only achievable by the minority, in my sister's young mind, ads like this set the standard of the perfect body—the definition of beauty. “A body for every body”—the only body. My sister fell victim to this lie.



Fad diets and a passion for fitness, hid her attempt to achieve the ideal body at first. With every long run, my parents just thought she was practicing for the next cross-country season. When she stopped eating meat, they believed her argument of new-found activism. But her drive to achieve the body was far too strong; her self-control was unlike any other—she had it in her to meet her goals. But my parents hadn't realized this yet.

With every look in the mirror, every check of her progress, she saw a different person looking back at her. Her fragile body accepted the lie of her reflection and absorbed it as fuel to push her harder, to limit herself more.



With everything in her, she wanted her own body, every cell of fat, to disappear. Every curve on her body, told her she was not beautiful; she wasn't like the girls in the magazine. She began to hate her own existence, the body that gave her life.



She paired these routine check-ups with the harsh feedback of the scale.

120

*It's time for a change.*

118

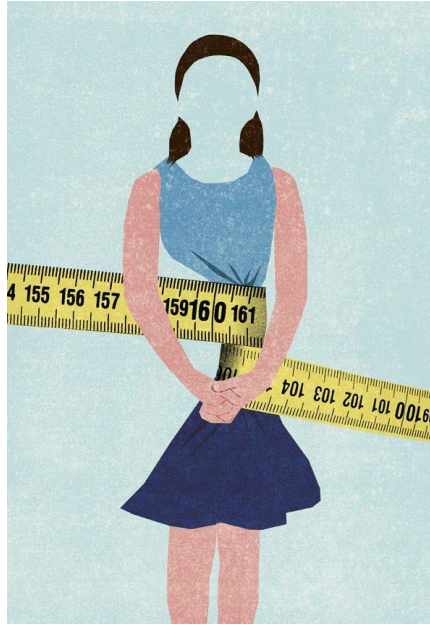
*Push harder. 4 more miles tomorrow.*

112

*Not enough.*

101

*Nothing tastes as good as skinny feels. Keep trying.*



She only made it so far before my parent's concern grew too strong. She couldn't trick them with an active lifestyle anymore. She was pushing herself too hard with her running—they said this as she iced another leg injury. This new diet was making her weaker—they said this as her waist got smaller and smaller. Her cheeks were sunken in, and her chest began to show every bone, begging to take up space. Her body was urging her to stop, but her brain was set on getting the perfect body.

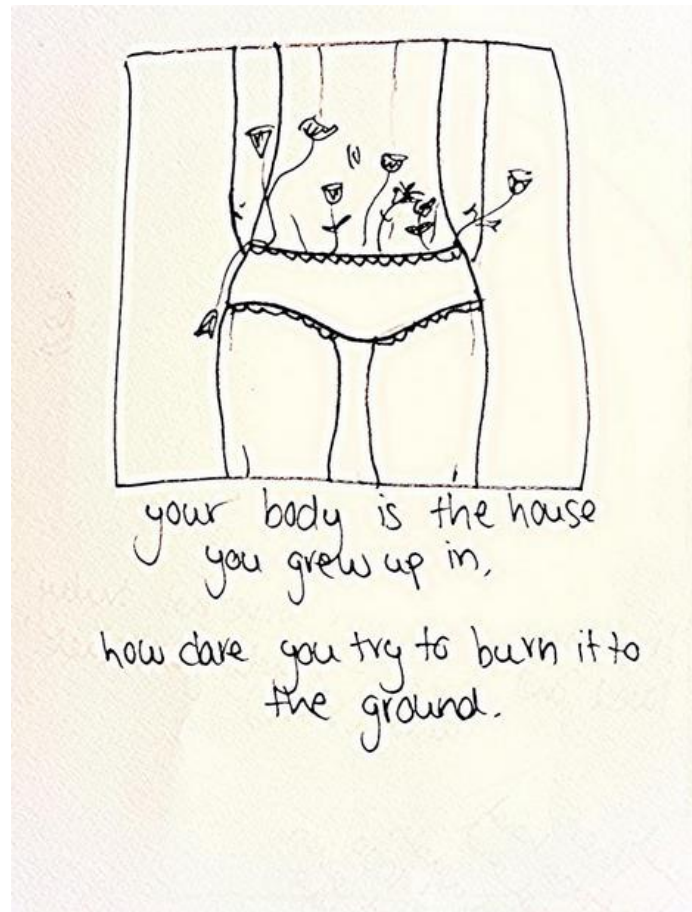
They caught her just in time before she met her goal of fading out of existence.

~

With time, she traded her counting of calories for counting hours in a hospital room, curing the effects of a twisted society with isolation. By starving herself of the lies she had been fed about the sick standards of beauty, she was able to find room for the food she so desperately needed. The hospital room became her protection from the lies of society. The hours of arts and crafts replaced her long runs. The counseling was the antidote for the poison that had filled her brain with the lies of the perfect body.



With time, she recovered—she found love for her own body. She found beauty in the body she had once wanted so badly to destroy, to disappear. She learned that it was okay to take up space.



Jessica is not alone in these struggles, yet her story was hidden away, kept secret from the world. As if reminding her that she is an outlier, and that her difference is yet again a problem—her own fault. Far too many girls face a similar story, hiding it away, as they too accept the lies of our society as fact. Worse, some of these girls don't get the help and saving they need, they achieve their goal, only gaining the attention they need when it's already too late—after they fade out of existence.



As time has passed though, our society has become more active at snuffing out the burn of these lies by showing the acceptance of every body through the beauty of our differences.



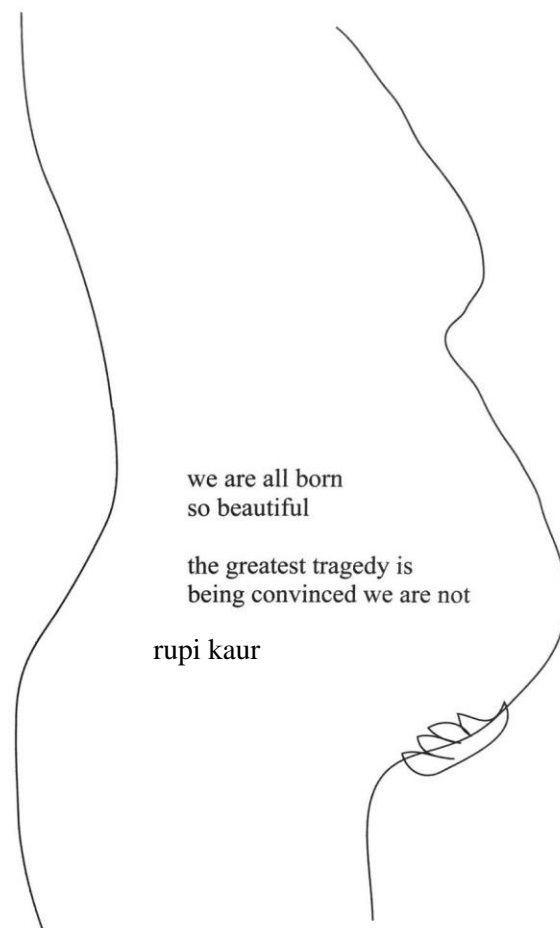
But there is still be work to be done. “Loving your body” is the simple fix that society offers, but there is a bigger problem at hand. Our society has become seemingly more accepting of the curves of women’s bodies, but it only exchanged this with new standards to be met. Today’s “skinny”, is the perfect hourglass figure with an abnormally large butt paired with a non-existent waist. Woman’s body standards have been turned into the object of sex-appeal. Trading one set of unrealistic standards for the next in the attempt to please an audience, who hasn’t faced the harsh reality of beauty standards. These standards yet again feed young minds unrealistic definitions of beauty.



Growing up in the aftermath of my sister's story, my eyes have been opened to this evil, and I have learned how important it is to disregard the ideals women are constantly being fed by society. Although I was too young to understand this as my sister faced this battle, I began to see this truth as I got older and faced a new set of standards. In the age of social media, the ads with perfectly toned celebrities repping magical drinks for a "flat tummy" and workout plans that guarantee a "tiny waist and round butt" or to "lose the muffin top" are almost inescapable. Workout videos market body types over strength or health, telling girls this is a healthy way to approach fitness. In 2020, fitness culture has become just another way for society to feed young girls toxic beauty standards.

Over a decade since Jessica's recovery, this societal problem has only shifted forms, and girls continue to face this in hiding. While her survival and growth through her sickness serves as a reminder for me that there is hope, its secrecy is a reminder that society tells girls they have to change to be beautiful but hide the struggles and shame of their disorder when they've gone too far. A truly sickening reality.

The only way to fight these standards is to instill in young girls that external beauty does not warrant our place in society. The number of a jean size or the shape of a body should not change one's self worth. We live in a society that tells women that we need to hide our bodies, or whittle them away, or refuse to take up space—that our body is the problem. This is the twisted lie of society, but truly, I tell you, society, itself, is the problem. As women living in a twisted society we must do everything we can to protect each other from the negative side effects of the lies we face. Our bodies are not the problem.



## Cultural Criticism Piece

### Make America—the Right—Great Again

The Red Hat symbolizes a winning campaign and, thus, the support of the majority of the nation. It seemingly markets for something every American should want—a great country. In my years growing up in a rural farming town, I began to see more and more classmates, neighbors, and friends with the Hat—until the whole town became a sea of Red Hats. The Red Hat owners couldn't understand how someone could not support Him and His plan for making America as *great* as it supposedly once was. As I watched everyone join the sea of Red, I found it hard to understand. My family had never supported Him and the things He stood for, but we learned to keep quiet as to not pick a fight with something as *great* as the sea.

Before the election, we saw Him everywhere, the creator of the Red Hat. We saw the countless debates, campaign ads, infamous tweets, and new reports, and with it, we saw the truth in the Red Hat. He talked about building a wall, claiming it would protect us from Mexico—telling us that we should fear our differences with the people there. *When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending the best. They're not sending you; they're sending people that have lots of problems and they're bringing those problems.* He told us that that they are not like us. He told us that they are a problem, and their absence is what will make America great. *They're bringing drugs, they're bringing crime. They're rapists...* As if there are no American drug dealers or criminals or rapists, He deems them all our enemies because they are not one of us—telling citizens this is the way we should think of immigrants, families trying to escape their country for a better life. This talk doesn't deter the buyers of the Red Hat though; it only urges them to buy more, to spread the word.

But this is not the only form of injustice He has favored. As the election pushed nearer, more and more women spoke out about harassment, verbal and not, that He has dealt. These women who showed courage for speaking out about this injustice were made a source of mockery and had their validity tested. Still, He gained supporters and sold more Red Hats. Eventually, the media gained proof of His disrespect for women and disregard for consent. He bragged, *I just start kissing them. It's like a magnet. Just kiss. I don't even wait. And when you're a star, they let you do it. You can do anything. Grab them by the pussy. You can do anything.* Brushing it off as locker room talk, or missing headline completely in their bubble Fox news, the owners of the Red Hat still gave their support. Boys will be boys.

Once He gained his office and power, we continued to see this disrespect of people different than Him. Just last summer, He took to Twitter to argue that a few Democratic members of Congress, who are *from countries whose governments are a complete and total catastrophe*, should *go back* to their countries. Three out of the four Congress members were in fact born in the United States, but regardless of this, He discriminated against respected members of the government for the color of their skin and political party. Those congress members spent their lives' committing themselves to our country, but with His words, He stole that away, and made them seem like they weren't one of us. Because these officials were on the other side of a fight between two parties, the Red Hat owners did not mind His injustice and disrespect.

The congress members are not the only public figures to face His racism though. Again, as the next election drew closer, He took to Twitter to bash his opponents for the 2020 presidential election and repeatedly called Elizabeth Warren *Pocahontas* for her Native

American heritage. In a Tweet, he welcomed her to the race saying, *See you on the campaign TRAIL, Liz!* His reference to the Trail of Tears aims to degrade Warren as a presidential candidate based on her heritage. Even worse, He found humor in the stain in United States' history as the white man forced the Natives out of their land, comparing their historical pain and suffering to her loss in the election. But once again, because she was on the other side, the Red Hat wearers brushed this aside.

In bold white embroidery the Hat says, *Make America Great Again*. The Hat is red with hatred. It advertises a future in which America is as great as its past—a future that backtracks on the progress we have made in the long fight for representation and justice for minorities. It markets a future in which white men regain the unshared power they once had, power that guarantees status over minorities no matter the wealth or respect they have earned—a birth right of America. A reality in which leadership is idolized for their disrespect and oppression of entire groups of people. The Red Hat and its wearers support the disrespect He has shown to these groups of people and on countless other occasions. It is time for our society to regret His idea of greatness and remove the sea of Red hate it has created. This oppression does not make America great; it is what our country should be escaping.