



Your Story MATTERS

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Columnist

Confronting body shame

I always ask my clients to rate their self-esteem 0-10. The vast majority of my clients rate themselves below 5. If my client happens to be female, complaints about her body almost always dominate the list of why. Intellect, character, performance and achievement are often never mentioned.

It is altogether disheartening how many of us associate value and worth with size, the number on the scale, and measurements that are idealized by a social concept that is unrealistic and, in many cases, impossible.

Like most women, memories of my own body shame are all too vivid. I remember the early days of elementary school playing follow-the-leader on the playground and not being able to fit through small spaces that seemed so effortless for my peers. I remember my portions and

food choices being scrutinized by family members. I remember seeing the school counselor and being told I eat too much. I remember starting at my young body in the mirror — loathing what I saw and wishing I could switch bodies with the Disney princesses or Barbies I idolized. In dismay I would compare the size of my legs, my arms, my stomach compared to my peers — and this was all before middle school.

Rather quickly, my body seemed to lengthen rather than widen. I stretched to nearly 5 feet 10 inches by the seventh grade and the dynamic of attention and commentary shifted. Seemingly too tall for pre-pubescent boys my own age, suddenly there were comments from men — sometimes much older men: Catcalls, innuendos, and crass remarks on my physical form that still seemed so new and foreign to my budding mind. Soaking in what seemed to be validation, I strived to maintain the streak of physical affirmation, sometimes by means of extremes. Food restriction and excessive exercise became a pattern. Negative self-talk was the driver. I could not let myself be satisfied. I was terrified of regressing.

Our society promotes a sustained hypervigilance around body image, and while I have made progress, I am not out of the woods. Women and girls are often ridden with trauma regarding their bodies. Whether it be a collection of accumulated comments and encounters or events of

blatant harassment or abuse, we are taught from a very young age that the form of our bodies defines our worth and, in some cases, even our survival. Other elements of our being and soul are minimized, disregarded, and suppressed. As the inevitable shifting and ultimate decline of our physical bodies occurs, we are confronted by shame and guilt as the form of our body may drift farther away from the social ideal. Social media further reinforces our shame, as edited and filtered comparisons are only one click away.

So make a point to praise your daughter, partner, spouse, or family member on attributes other than her physicality. Support her in creating a legacy of inner beauty and confidence. Ladies — we can be our own worst enemies. Let's try to refrain from objectifying one another. Let's honor each other's accomplishments outside of what happens in the gym or on a scale. Modest or immodest, let's realize we are all marvelously complex despite our exterior. Let's celebrate our diversity and be unafraid to call out unrealistic and harmful stereotypes and ideals.

Character, compassion, intellectualism, humor, empathy, and mindfulness resonate far more than the number on a scale. After all, I have yet to see anything about weight loss or dress size on somebody's tombstone. On that note, give your body grace. It will fail standards again and again, but your value is far more unconditional.

Suicide prevention workshop set

The Sisters Elementary School Parent-Teacher Community (SPTC) is hosting a Q.P.R. (Question. Persuade. Refer.) Institute workshop for suicide prevention in collaboration with St. Charles Health System.

Workshops will be held on Tuesday, May 1 in English and Wednesday, May 2 in Spanish, both from 6:30 to 8 p.m. in the lecture room at Sisters High School.

Q.P.R. is an evidence-based suicide-prevention training program that is intended to offer hope through positive action. Community members who would like to be equipped with skills to assist individuals that may be in need of some help and are invited to join either training session.

Q.P.R. training sessions are in collaboration with St. Charles Health System, through their suicide-prevention initiative. This basic training program seeks to train individuals who, because of their contact with those who may be at risk of suicide, are often in the best position to identify and refer people thinking about suicide to important resources and services.

All training sessions are free of charge and open to anyone in the community over the age of 16. There is limited space available and pre-registration is suggested. Pre-register by emailing SistersPTC@gmail.com.

For more information contact Erin Borla at 541-480-5994.



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