

I used to be able to stand feet together without my thighs touching . There was this sick feeling of satisfaction that went along with possessing one of the "unattainable" body ideals circulating the internet. I could compare my body to models on Tumblr or "goals" accounts on Twitter and feel like I'd achieved something, even though I hadn't. My hips are so wide that the gap is my default setting.

I never spoke up when my friends were rolling their eyes at the thigh gap phenomenon, but quietly, I thought that surely they must wish they had one too. How could they not? I didn't think I had a poor body image, but when I gained weight and lost that empty space, I realized I had it all wrong.

There was also something called a bikini bridge, though it was one of the lesser known of all the impossible standards. My body is built for childbearing, so I have hip bones that jut from my sides like they're trying to pierce through my skin. Or at least I did. When I gained weight, the fat filled in the place between my legs and the hollows of my collarbones and the sharp angles of my hips. I'm rounder now. Softer.

And I wasn't okay with this for a long, long time. I am no longer the perfect hourglass that I imagined myself to be. I held onto this picture of proportions that I thought I could impose upon myself until the wind tore it from my fingers and I was left grasping at empty air.

I no longer have a thigh gap. I no longer have a bikini bridge. My collarbones are only visible when I shrug my shoulders upwards and sink my chest in. I am less of what I was and more of me. More, in a physical sense. There is more of me. More cells, more matter packed into the space that I occupy.

I wish I could pinpoint the moment when I first felt discontentment with my body. This feeling of disgust at the rolls on my belly and the jiggle of my thighs is relatively new, though it feels like society's standards seeped into my cells and merged with my mitochondria before I had the chance to say no.

I'm curvy, but that's no longer what society wants. The ideal has changed. Slim is in. Athletic, but still feminine. Curvy is now a dirty word, used by marketing teams as a synonym for obese. Easier to use in ad campaigns. The first time I saw a "curvy" section in a department store, I got excited. Finally! Pants that won't gape at the waist! But upon closer inspection, of course, it was just the plus size stuff renamed.

I'm healthier now, and that's all what matters. I'm making lifestyle choices that make me feel good, and I know that my wellness doesn't translate into a number on the scale.

I won't lie and say I love my body, but I do love it more often. Unconditional love is a long way off. There are days when I feel like my stomach is hanging over my waistband and sweats are the only things I can fit into, but there are also days when I slide into black skinny jeans and feel like my confidence is almost tangible.

Whether we realize it or not, we are bombarded by the media with images of perfect bodies, even though those perfect bodies aren't real. We learn to compare ourselves with Photoshopped versions of thighs and tummies and arms. We learn to skinny-shame and fat-shame (and slut-shame, but that's another essay).

And beyond all this, the world we live in objectifies women and sexualizes their bodies without their permission. And then, just when you think it couldn't get any worse, we're shamed for the sexuality we never asked for. Our schools forbid shoulders and knees, butts and boobs, bra straps and midsections. Supposedly equal dress codes target girls to keep them from distracting boys. We're held

responsible for their behavior and we mustn't keep them from receiving an education. Supposedly standard dress codes target those over 5'4", those with C cups or above, those with anything more than a pancake for a butt.

We're supposed to love our bodies, but they make it damn near impossible.