

Creative Writing Contest 2023

Using the Enemy by Taylor Rumsey

Creative Nonfiction – 2nd Place

I ran off the bus with tears streaming down my face, threw open the front door, and escaped to my room where I would explain to my dad what had happened. Breaking my dad's heart, twelve-year-old me repeated the awful comments some kids from my grade had said and revealed that some kids were also hitting me. I was called fat, ugly, and stupid. Not only was I being called these names on the bus, but also in the classroom.

There was a time when my class was learning about similes. We were prompted to turn with a partner and think of unique examples. One of my bullies turned to me and said, "Taylor is as fat as a hippo." This scenario occurred in second grade, but, as a freshman in college, I still remember my bully's exact words. Bit by bit, my self-esteem flaked away. These comments may have seemed earth-shattering at the time, but they were just the tip of the iceberg.

The negativity towards my body and appearance was like a parasite and has stuck with me ever since. The comments evolved into a change in my own actions. I stopped eating and started working out. A lot. Skipping breakfast turned into also skipping lunch and then, eventually, skipping meals altogether. I was living off of a chocolate chip Clif bar a day. I was losing myself. Although there were no longer any bullies tearing me down, I was tearing myself down by comparing myself to others on social media. I was viewing bodies that were polar opposites of mine and absorbing a false and unattainable expectation of myself. To make matters worse, many of the images were photoshopped and unattainable by any human being.

Unfortunately, I am not the only victim of this issue. Fifty-two percent of middle school girls are found to relate to at least one sign of an eating disorder, and seventy-five percent of those girls are on social media platforms (Dutta). I survived years of anorexia and still struggle with

disordered eating today, so it is important that other girls are aware of social media's cause of eating disorders and its effects on body image.

There are many types of eating disorders. The most commonly known disorders are anorexia, binge eating, and bulimia. Anorexia is an eating disorder where an individual is hyper-focused on obtaining a lower body weight by unhealthily restricting caloric intake and over-exercising (Mayo). Anorexia can lead to malnutrition, weak bones, and a lack of energy. I mainly struggled with anorexia as can be seen through the singular daily Clif bar. As a result, I often fainted at least ten times a day. Binge eating, according to the National Eating Disorder Association (NEDA), is the "recurrent episodes of eating large quantities of food (often very quickly and to the point of discomfort)" (NEDA). Oftentimes binge eaters finish their episode and feel embarrassed and ashamed. Binge eating can result in obesity and heart issues. Bulimia is similar to binge eating, however, after an individual goes through a binge episode, or after any meal or snack, they will purge (force themselves to throw up the food or use laxatives) ("Bulimia Nervosa"). Bulimia is dangerous as it introduces stomach acid to the esophagus and mouth, and it results in the breakdown of tooth enamel. Although all three eating disorders are unique, it is dire to spread information about each to instill healthy eating habits.

An article written by Anne Morris and Debra Katzman called "The Impact of the Media on Eating Disorders in Children and Adolescents" discusses the positive and negative impacts of social media on young minds. A specific part of the article examines the change in media throughout the years. It has been found that the body styles of women in magazines have become much thinner. When it comes to men, the physique has targeted a more muscular figure. These gradual changes were followed by an increase in fitness in adolescent girls between 1970 and 1990. Children at the time were focused on obtaining a thinner appearance and were willing to

go through dangerous measures of over-exercising and under-eating. Morris and Katzman also touched on studies where participants were shown materials with the “ideal female body” and materials with average-sized or plus-sized models. The majority of participants claimed to be less self-conscious about their appearance after viewing the average or plus-sized models. Although the article does not directly claim that social media is the root cause of body image issues, and, in return, eating disorders, the article claims that social media makes a large impact. Social media can be used in a positive way to promote healthy habits and self-confidence, but many platforms are unknowingly harming individuals, especially young females, regarding self-image (Morris).

Between my freshman and sophomore years of high school, I decided to take control of my body and not be influenced by the bodies and people on social media. In doing this, I used my enemy. I decided to go onto Snapchat, a popular social media platform, and create a group chat. This group was open to any girls who had similar feelings as me about their bodies. It was open to girls who had gone through, or were going through, an eating disorder. I posted every day eating realistic meals, showing unfiltered body types, and telling my own story. I also made it possible for others to share their stories either publicly or anonymously. Not only was I helping other girls just like me, but I was holding myself accountable in the healing process.

Now, although I started this off by posing social media as a villain, at the end of the day, it is a tool that people give power to. I have seen social media platforms used in negative ways, but I have also seen them used for good. I believe the topic of eating disorders and social media should be discussed more often. When people are taught about the dangers of unhealthy eating habits and the capabilities of social media, people are bound to think more in-depth about their choices. If I had been taught about these topics when I was growing up, I guarantee I would have

been able to control my thoughts and actions a little more. I think about raising my future daughter, and I pray that she never has to go through my struggles. When thinking about the future generations to come, social media and technology are only going to grow. Therefore, rather than fearing social media and its capabilities, people need to regain control and use it for good: to uplift and encourage rather than teardown and destroy.

Work Cited

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