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### Being Underweight

“Dude, just eat more.” is something I always get told more than I should. I reply, “I do eat, it's just...” and then it is too late to tell them what is really going on. Is my explanation not good enough for them? Am I only defined by my weight? Society has always depicted the ideal body type for a guy as someone who is muscular, but not too muscular, but also not too thin where it looks like they do not have muscle. It is an unrealistic image of what people perceive as a normal body, yet it is never talked about for guys. Every superhero movie I would watch as a kid would always have the main character in a suit that looks 3 sizes too small for him, just to show that he is muscular. On top of that, there is at least one scene in every Marvel movie where the superhero is shirtless, showing off their unrealistic muscles. The media consumed as kids really does shape us into who we are today without us even realizing it. I have always been surrounded by fake body standards, and I always just assumed that I would eventually gain weight as I got older, and then would eventually look like the media and people that surrounded me. My weight has been a struggle of mine my whole life, and recently I am putting extra focus on trying to change it. It has always been an insecurity of mine, and it does not help when I get comments from my peers, my family, and people in general. Most of the time, the comments are misconceptions about me and my eating habits, or they question my health. Sometimes, it is

meant to be “loving,” while most of the time it is meant to bring me down. When I do finally feel comfortable talking about my weight struggles, most of the time I am not met back with acceptance, as it is hard for some people to deal with the fact that males can struggle with their weight at an early age. It is hard for them to also digest that underweight people like me can be capable of doing stuff, care for my body, be comfortable with myself, and just exist!

There have been many times when people think that I am not capable of doing something just because of my weight. Often when people need help with something to lift or move, I offer to help, but then I am met with responses like, “You are too skinny for that; you can’t do that.” I am always given weird and dirty looks when it comes to lifting things up, as people think so low of me just because of my build. After I finish some type of lift, whether it is me helping lift boxes, or just doing a rep on the bench press, I am always met with the same response; “Wow, you don’t look like you can do that.” The comments I receive are always backhanded, and they are always from people who are more built and more muscular than me. Gyms are meant to be a safe, comfortable space, yet I always feel like I stick out like a sore thumb. I started going to the gym to make myself feel better about my body, and it can get challenging when I receive comments or simply weird looks. If I am not disrupting you, there is no need to belittle me just to make yourself feel like the bigger person, literally and figuratively.

In addition to the judgement that people can give, society thinks that I do not care about my body because I am underweight. From the outside, people always assume that I never work out and that I barely eat any food. Whenever I tell someone “Oh, I am sore from a workout that I did yesterday,” they always assume that I am just joking around, or that I am so weak that I barely even worked out. I get belittled a lot for me saying any type of workout at all around the “gym bros” because they are experts on EVERYTHING when it comes to fitness (even if they

just started lifting a couple of months ago). I also get strange looks of judgment whenever I mention that I had tons of food or that I am meal-prepping. I remember one time I was visiting my family at a relative's house, and it came time to eat dinner. I was already preparing myself for some sort of comment from a relative about my eating habits, and so it happened. I had some food, but I was very full already. One relative saw me eating some food and ask my mom “does he even care about himself?” while I was sitting right in front of her. At the time, I did not understand what she meant, but I then realized that she was talking about my eating. I felt like I was letting her down in a way, and it caused me to really feel bad about myself. From that point on, I started to become hyperaware of what others see me as when it comes to my body image and my eating. Yet, I also knew that I do care about my body, as I work out and I love to take care of myself. I find peace in knowing at the end of every day that I am caring for myself every day without even realizing it. While I think about that comment, I can use it as motivation to prove them wrong, and to prove to myself that I am a healthy person.

People make guys that deal with underweight problems feel like they should not be feeling this way, and it is something that should not happen, just because of their gender. As I mentioned before, I grew up watching superhero movies as a kid, as it was my favorite thing to watch. Every superhero was always ripped, and I thought I was going to grow up and look like the people on the TV or the movie screen. Growing up with access to social media, I was exposed to many topics of weight. I always saw people struggling with being underweight, but I never saw any guys talk about it, only girls. It really made me question if I should even be feeling the way that I was. For many years, I always thought that it was something only girls have a problem with, and eventually, I would just get big and strong over time. When I would ask my friends why they were not skinny like me anymore, they would always respond with

“Just eat bro. It isn’t that hard.” The more guys that I talked to about this, the more comments I received that it wasn't something a guy should be feeling, and that I need to “suck it up and go to the gym.”

It is common to feel like an outsider when you are underweight. It is easy to put someone down to bring yourself up, people do it all the time. One time at my old job, I sat down a group of insecure teenagers at a table and gave them their menus. I then went back to my stand, waiting for another group to arrive. As I was waiting, I overheard the group talking about someone, hoping it was not me. I turn around and I see them secretly pointing, and then whispering, and then following group laughter while they all stare at me. Then, the comments came, saying I look like “I haven’t eaten in days” and other simply weird comments. At first, I did not think anything of it. Who cares what they think? But at that moment, I did, and I still think about it. They wanted me to feel isolated and alone, just to bring their miserable selves up. When their server came back with their food, their manners and personalities switched like a light switch, and suddenly, they were the sweetest angels on earth. In some sort of comforting way, I think now I have come to the point where I would rather feel isolated from those types of people rather than try to fit in and become one of them. Sure, it doesn't feel good knowing that those comments might still happen but knowing that I am the bigger person in the situation is a better feeling.

Many people think I am not capable of doing something, I do not care about myself, I shouldn't feel this way because of my gender, and people isolate me all because of my weight being lower than the normal teenage guy. I understand why from the outside it might concern some people, but it does not give them the right to be mean or belittle me because of it. If the world could see that guys can be underweight, there wouldn't have to be this stigma around this topic. Kids who grew up like me would not have to worry about going to the beach or worrying

about their bodies in general. The next time you think about commenting on someone's weight to make yourself feel better, think about their inner child and how you are being hurtful towards them too. If you wouldn't say it to a 5-year-old, then you shouldn't say it to someone you don't even know either.