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### Lightweight, Heavy Struggles

“Rad bod” or “dad bod?” What if you don’t fit into either? In high school, where everyone constantly tries to fit in, standards created social media influencers and celebrities determine how our bodies are supposed to look. Many of my peers say that I’m lucky to be skinny, or that they wished that they were skinny like me. I may seem like I am grasping for attention, complaining about something so petty, but as a male in high school, being skinny can be a major struggle. From being called “twig” and “skin and bones” to being asked if I “blow away in the wind,” there are many ways to point out a skinny person’s weight. While these are some obviously negative examples, even passing comments that everybody seems to forget (but me) can be enough to kill my mood. Even if not all comments about my weight are meant to be malicious, I would much rather prefer that people keep these comments to themselves. Skinny people are expected to be unbothered by casual mentions of their weight, they can struggle with their body image, they are assumed to be solely responsible for their weight, and they may feel a physical toll. Although being skinny may seem like a blessing, it holds many burdens that are not usually discussed. I hope that people can come to recognize that weight is not something that should be discussed. Whether it’s a compliment or a snarky joke, there is no need to mention it without a proper reason.

As a child, I did not fully understand what weight really was or why we were different. I just thought it was cool that if I sucked in my breath, you could see every rib like a skeleton. But,

as I grew older, this “party trick” wasn’t as much fun when it was met with comments from adults about how I needed to eat more. Other parents or family members would often joke with my own parents, asking if they were even feeding me. I laughed along, promising that I was keeping up a healthy diet full of all the nutrients I need, but hearing adults talking about my weight made me realize that, regardless of the fact that I was perfectly healthy, my weight wasn’t normal. By elementary school, I was already scared of swimming in public. I loved being in the water and playing with my friends, but I was embarrassed to be seen by others. In 5<sup>th</sup> grade, our entire class took a field trip to an indoor water park. There were dozens of fun activities to participate in—from a rock-climbing wall to a ropes course to the biggest waterslide I had ever seen. It was a dream field trip for any other 5<sup>th</sup> grader. My problem: I had to take my shirt off. Seven years later, I hardly remember the fun events in the water, the awesome rock-climbing wall, the adrenaline as I glided down the massive waterslide. All I remember was standing in line, talking to a couple of girls in my class, my arms crossed to cover my ribs. Although these girls never made comments about my weight, I still felt embarrassed by myself—the result of comments made by grown adults, likely teaching their own children to treat everybody with kindness. They say that these comments are harmless or only made in a joking manner, but I say that any comment about weight can be damaging. Especially as a child, where you look up to adults as your role models, jokes or mention of weight can make a child feel like they aren’t normal, even if they are perfectly healthy. It isn’t that hard to steer clear of the mention of weight, so just play it safe and avoid it all-together.

Direct comments from people can be damaging, but the body image stereotypes for men that are presented by social media and pop culture can also lead to insecurity among skinny guys. Social media promotes muscular builds for men. Many of the top male influencers fit the mold, powered by expensive personal trainers and intensive diets. One influencer I used to follow,

Steve Prince, promoted himself using shirtless videos, claiming he used his 12-week workout plan to build all of his muscle. He used his fitness platform to sell this workout plan, despite the fact that the results were exaggerated. But who could blame the people that bought it? Anyone wants to be found attractive, and that muscular build is the standard for attractive men on social media. Movies and TV shows also promote herculean physiques among men. In *Captain America: The First Avenger*, Steve Rogers is ridiculed by his army platoon. He is depicted as skittish, shy, and incapable of many of the physical tasks the other troops can handle. Suddenly, after undergoing a procedure to make him ripped, Steve Rogers is confident and capable. People respect him and he uses his newfound confidence to save the world. I don't have a machine that can do that, so am I just stuck as the skinny Steve Rogers the rest of my life? When I watched the movie, I felt like I was doomed to live my life as the embarrassing, shy, skinny kid, just as Steve Rogers was depicted at the start of the movie. I concede that I also have my own preferences; I can't judge others for their opinions on who they think would be a more realistic superhero. It is just important for people to recognize that ads, movies, and other popular culture constantly remind skinny guys of the fact that they don't exactly fit the standard for men.

With the fictitious examples of Captain America's super serum or Peter Parker's spider bite, it seems easy to suddenly gain some bulk. In real life, putting on weight can be extremely difficult for many people. While "just eat more" is a common response to any small complaint I make about my weight, it is not at all that simple. Genetics can often play a major role in body weight. I don't eat particularly healthily; I don't exercise excessively. I have tried eating obscene amounts of food in the past, just to see if it would nudge the scale, but nothing has stuck. Many people may think that being able to eat without a fear of gaining weight is a dream, but it is a massive roadblock for me. I *want* to put on weight. As a last-ditch effort at gaining weight, I tried a "dirty bulk," shoveling loads of junk food into my mouth whenever I could. After school,

I would eat Cheez-its, fruit snacks, cheese sticks, pretzels and other food or snacks whenever I wasn't completely full. Unfortunately, all this did was make my stomach twist into knots. While the comparison may seem counterintuitive, gaining weight for people like me can be very similar to struggles with losing weight. In both cases, people struggle for control of their bodies, with these struggles even escalating to instances of eating disorders or body dysmorphic disorder. Even though many people say that putting on weight is easy, I would argue that weight is different for everybody, and one simple tip cannot change your weight to match what you desire.

Being skinny does not just impose mental effects on someone; physical effects can be just as draining. There are some minimal effects of being skinny that come to mind: getting cold faster, digestion problems, nutrient deficiencies, etc. My bigger issue is just with being generally weak. On one of the most important days of my life, I was a pallbearer for my grandfather's funeral. I and the other male cousins were tasked with loading the casket into the hearse. I was worried that the casket would be too heavy for just us guys—that I would not be carrying my weight. There ended up being no issues and it seemed that my worry was all for nothing. Still, the fact that my brain could be worrying about such an irrational issue during a time that was so important, just goes to show how much my weight consumes my brain and my life.

While many people may think that skinny people do not face struggles of body image, that could not be further from the truth. The comments made, pressure felt through media, people's misunderstanding of the difficulty of putting on weight, and the physical tolls can be extremely detrimental to a skinny person's image and confidence. Complaining about this part of my life makes me extremely uncomfortable. It feels more as though I am whining about something someone else really wants. I have even received comments from some of my female friends, saying that they wish they were as skinny as me, or they complement me jokingly on how "snatched" my waist is. These comments can be emasculating and make me feel

embarrassed that my physique is the envy of women rather than the attraction of them. This is not to deny that there are some perks to being skinny. I have found a love for running and have reached a very competitive level that I may not have been able to reach without my tall and skinny frame. There are definite perks to being skinny, but it is not all sunshine-and-rainbows as some people may believe. I am not saying that skinny people face the issue of their weight on an everyday basis, but I just urge you to consider how you treat skinny people and how you can keep an open mind towards them. Maybe next time instead of “rad bod” or “dad bod,” we can find a middle ground which supports all body types.