



YOUR BODY

Meet seven women who overcame self-criticism and embraced their perfectly imperfect selves
AS TOLD TO GINA ROBERTS-GREY

“PETITE FRAME”

**Tiffany Pittman, 36,
Delray Beach, Florida**

I was in fourth grade when bike shorts hit the fashion scene, and I was so excited when my mom bought me a pair. But when I stepped onto the school bus in my new shorts, some boys said I was too skinny to wear them and all the other kids laughed. I never wore that outfit again. Growing up, I saw thick as the epitome of being a woman, and despite being cornbread-fed I didn't get the goods. In high school, at size 0, I felt inadequate and ugly. I prayed to gain weight and forced myself to eat. Nothing worked. In college I accepted my size and began weight lifting to sculpt my body. I've been working out ever since because it makes me feel good. I wish I could have loved my body when I was younger. I learned when you appreciate yourself, you attract people who appreciate you.

HEALTHY & HAPPY

I ♥ MY...

“CURVY SHAPE”

**Natasha Coleman, 35,
Panama City, Florida**

I am not a skinny woman, but that doesn't mean I'm not fit. I have always been confident in my appearance, even back in 2010 when I was at my heaviest, 438 pounds. That's when not fitting into an airplane seat made me realize that I couldn't continue to live at that weight, so I set out to change it.

Exercise was never a factor in my life; I didn't play any sports as a kid. But I fell in love with Zumba, which helped me shed 228 pounds. To keep my fitness foundation and teach others what worked for me, I became a certified Zumba instructor. However, despite being a curvy size 12, people often look at me funny when I tell them I teach Zumba. They'll look me up and down and ask, "You teach fitness?" At first, the comments were tough to hear. I used to get upset that I didn't have the slim appearance typically associated with being an exercise instructor.

But I got over that. I believe in loving yourself at any size. I did when I was overweight. I continue to love myself no matter what others think.

Recently, a small lady in my class remarked, "You can really move for such a large lady. I could barely keep up." My first thought was that despite losing half my size, people still think I'm big. Then I was glad that even though I outweighed her by almost 100 pounds, she was having a hard time keeping up with me!

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“MUSCULAR ARMS”

**Andrea Simon, 28,
Charlotte, North Carolina**

Since elementary school, baring my arms made me feel uncomfortable. I've dealt with questions like "Do you pump iron?" and references to my "guns." I dreamed of wearing tank tops and looking the way other girls looked in them. I wanted to feel small and petite, which I equated with femininity.

When I decided to lose weight and get in shape and actually began pumping iron, I discovered that, because of these arms, I could hold my body in yoga poses and do other things I never knew I could. It was the first time I embraced feeling strong. That acceptance and strength felt feminine and sexy to me. Seeing others work hard for the muscular arms I was born with gave me an appreciation for them. Today I'm confident putting on a sleeveless shirt and love showing off my arms. It feels great to embrace my body. I wish I had shown love to my arms sooner.



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“SMALL BREASTS”

Fatima Scipio, 40, Trenton

Having breasts smaller than most of my friends made me the target of cruel jokes from adolescent boys. I remember wishing my breasts were larger because I didn't want to be part of the "itty bitty titty committee" anymore.

Growing up with small breasts made me feel like a boy. My more endowed friends' dresses fit their bodies snug around the bust, but mine just hung. I laugh about it now, but back then it was not funny. In my house I stuffed my bra with tissue to see what a bigger size looked like but never had the guts to go outside with padding.

My parents have always been very supportive of their kids, and my mother was very influential in helping me develop my self-confidence. She let me know who I was and who God said I was regardless of what others said about me. That encouragement helped me start to appreciate my

breasts and love everything about myself. As my self-esteem grew I stopped wishing for a bigger

bra size and started enjoying clothing that accentuated my A cups. After I had my son I went up a size and cherished that as well.

Having a smaller bust didn't define me as a girl nor does it define me as a woman. When you learn to embrace your body it is a wonderful feeling that gives you freedom. We are wonderfully made in all shapes and sizes. >



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I ♥ MY...

“FLAT BUTT”

Sedaria Williams, 35, Memphis

I am not the standard Black woman. I have size 40DD breasts, toned legs and thighs, but no butt to speak of. My sisters sometimes teased me and called me the “White girl” of the bunch. I would laugh it off and even crack a joke myself, thinking if anyone was going to talk about my rear, it was going to be me. But as my butt failed to blossom, insecurities about my shape grew. My jokes were followed by tears I shed alone at home. In our community, a curvy butt is equated with womanliness. And not only did I feel less womanly, but I also felt like less of a Black woman. I always felt left out when men complimented ladies on their figures.

Long skirts and dresses that weren't form-fitting helped me play down the fact that I did not have a curvier bottom. Butt pads and belts kept my pants up. But none of those tricks kept me from wishing I'd fill out in back. Then, I met the man who would become my husband. The self-proclaimed “butt man” told me he loved my shapely legs, my personality, and the way I walked in heels. Having this tall, muscular, handsome man compliment me helped me realize I was as womanly as anyone. I started loving me, and instead of focusing on something I didn't like, I began to hone in on what I love about myself. There's no hiding my flat behind, but when I walk into a room I show off attributes I love, like my legs and a kick-ass shoe collection.



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“BIG FEET”

Mevonnie Biggins, 31, Atlanta

As a kid, my feet seemed to grow faster than my body. Like most little girls, I loved parading around in my mother's shoes, but that ended when I was about 8 years old and my size 9's wouldn't fit into my mom's 7's. Before long, my feet hit size 11.

Having big feet took a toll on my spirit. I was very self-conscious and didn't want anyone to know how long my feet were. Things changed one day in college when my Florida A&M University “Marching 100” band sisters and I went to the mall and vowed not to leave until we found the best shoes for an upcoming band trip. That persistence taught me to never let up on finding shoes to complement my feet and put me on the path to loving all of me, even my feet! When I decided to be happy with me and treasure what makes me different, my world opened up. Although I may not find the perfect pair of shoes in one shopping session, I'm so glad I finally embraced my body and all its wonderful attributes.



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“TALL” NONATHLETIC BUILD”

Nwasha Edu, 36, Trenton

At 5 feet 10 inches barefoot, people naturally assume I'm an athlete. However, I've never played basketball or any other sport. I was tall as a child and always felt super uncomfortable about my height. Always last in line when teachers arranged us in size order, I had a standing reservation in the back row of class photos. Being so tall also made it hard to find clothes that fit. By the time I was in the seventh grade I was 5'8" and had to shop in the tall department—not exactly the type of fashions I wanted to wear. Even the sleeves on blouses and jackets were too short for my arms. I made sure my prom dress was floor-length to hide my ballet slippers—no way was I going to wear heels!

Hating my height made me feel like I was missing out because people saw something I didn't see in myself. I had my “aha!” moment at a workshop in high school where I learned tall people

tend to earn more and that the average height of North American CEOs was over 6 feet. That's when I figured my height was good for something besides basketball. Since then, I've come to love my stature after years of feeling embarrassed for standing out. Instead of wearing flats I wear heels, and I love them!



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