

Strong Women are Beautiful Women: Growing Up in a Swimmer's Body

by Lillian Nelson

Whether you are 13 years old and just growing into your body, or 20 years old and reshaping your body with college swimming, this sport really forces you to be aware of your own presence.

I cannot speak on behalf of our male counterparts in the sport, but growing up as a female swimmer, I can fully relate to the feeling of exposure swimming induces. When you are wearing a swimsuit in public for a few hours every day, it can feel as though your body is developing, maturing, and being shaped under a microscope.

Having extra wide shoulders, bulky biceps, and big quads aren't exactly the features emphasized on the Disney princesses we grew up idolizing, and we've all been in that situation where we can't buy that dress or that shirt because when we went to try it on in the store, it got stuck on our shoulders and we needed help getting it off.

Being a fairly big girl myself, I have experienced pretty much the full spectrum of the struggle. On my journey to growing into the athlete I am today, I have experienced being slightly overweight and I have experienced being slightly underweight, but regardless, I've always been bigger than my peers. Long arms, long legs, big hands, big feet.

At age 19, I stand at 5'11" and weigh 155lbs. I've always been among the tallest of my friends, even the boys, and "dainty" would not be a word I would use to describe myself.

It has taken me my whole life to work on being totally comfortable in my own body, and though there are definitely some insecurities that linger, over time, I have come to learn that a strong woman is a beautiful woman. There is no better sport to celebrate this in than swimming.

Next to the ESPN Body Issue, there have been many recent movements and endless literature on loving and accepting your body, especially aimed toward young women.

As I fall into this target audience, I have learned a lot lately from articles, speakers, etc. One of the most important things I've come to understand is that everyone is insecure about their bodies at some point or another, yet no one has the same set insecurities. Being insecure with your body comes with growing up. But that doesn't mean you should always feel that way.

Being an athlete, a swimmer especially, can open up a whole different world of insecurities. When your uniform is a swimsuit, there is very little you can hide. That being said, it is so important to remember how lucky we are to even have bodies that allow us to do what we do, no matter what magnitude we compete at. Not all 'strong' bodies are going to look the same. Swimming is one of the most physically demanding sports, so that in and of itself should make you confident that you are doing good by your body with every practice you finish.

Instead of being uncomfortable and insecure in your own body, no matter what you may criticize on yourself, own it.

Celebrate what you have been given to work with. We often forget the value of our own opinion on ourselves, and how much that opinion can make or break us on a daily basis. Your body is a

wondrous tool you have been given to shape and use to reach any goals you may have. So get out there, and show yourself and everyone how beautifully strong you can be.