

Can you see my belly?

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years later, fifty
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People always assume that gay guys walk around with huge confidence, wearing trendy clothes, and have an overall perfect look on fashion. Basically, a Paris Fashion model. Well, I hate to break it to you, but not every gay man fits this mold – certainly not me.

I have always had a complicated relationship with fashion. When I was younger, I wanted to become a fashion designer. The greatest memory I have of my grandma is when she taught me how to make clothing for my Piglet plushie. We would sit at the table just sewing little dresses. That's when I knew I had to do something with fashion. I started experimenting with wearing fun clothing items. But then I realised I was too fat. Well, society told me I was too fat. I was always advised to buy a larger size, so I could hide my belly. You can imagine what this can do to a 16-year-old that is trying to figure out who he is. My dream to become a fashion designer was slowly fading away and I started to hate clothing.

Everyone was always so concerned with how my body looked, that I eventually started to lose some weight. Well, 'some weight' is an understatement. I lost forty kilograms in two years. All I could think about was how amazing it would be if I could wear all the clothing that I dreamed of when I was younger. I just kept on thinking: the skinnier, the better.

You would assume that it would've made me feel very confident, right? False, I still bought larger clothing because I wanted to hide my belly. Even though I reached my goal, looking like a Paris Fashion model, I still didn't feel comfortable in my skin. The mentality of that fat 16-year-old that I used to be still consumed me. The comments of other people also didn't dim. Instead of telling me I need to lose weight, people around me started to tell me that I needed to gain weight. It felt like I would never fit in.

Over the years, the struggles with my body image continued. Sometimes I would lose a few kilograms, and then I would gain double the amount of what I lost. People kept making comments about my body. 'Have you lost weight? Don't forget to eat!' 'Maybe you should buy a bigger size? This is too tight, you can see everything you know?' I had enough. Eventually I realised that I would never fit the mold. And that actually nobody really does. This 'perfect' picture – that has been showcased to us since we were little – is fake. There is no perfect picture. Whatever you do, people will always share their comments. No matter how much you change about your appearance, you will always find a hidden flaw. When I asked myself: 'when did I feel the happiest?' I couldn't even answer the question. Something had to change.



And now we're here, four years later, and fifty kilograms heavier. I have never been so fat in my life. But you know what? My confidence has grown. My passion for clothing and fashion has come back to me. But most importantly, the love I have for myself is back. And of course, it's not that simple. I have days where I absolutely dislike my body, but who doesn't? When these days arrive, a friend of mine always says: 'There is just more of you to love.' A comment that I hold on too dearly.

I have come to terms with the fact that my body doesn't determine what clothes I can and can't wear. I can wear a skin-tight tank top if I want to. But I can also wear an oversized sweater. It all depends on what I want. Not my body and certainly not the comments of others. Currently, I feel more confident walking down a catwalk as a Paris Fashion Week model than I did when I was forty kilograms lighter. And if you see my belly through my t-shirt, so what?