Shapes of UT

**Curvy women redefine
beauty standards.**

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Growing up in an age when Barbie was our best friend, young girls would look to the screens or turn the pages of magazines and see the ideal beauty standard as having a model's thin body. However, with the increasing popularity of Instagram models and portrayal of women with curvy, picturesque hourglass figures, it seems as though there has been a shift in what society considers beautiful.

Story by **Alexis Green**
Photos by **Marybeth Schmidt**

While the portrayal of curvier women seems great on the surface, this "ideal" image of curvy women with perfect breasts, hips and flat stomachs does not always represent the body type of the average curvy person. Five women at the University of Texas at Austin discuss the evolving perception of beauty standards that fails to recognize the diverse shapes and sizes of all curvier women.

"This idea of curvy as having a larger butt and breasts with a smaller waist, which I don't identify with at all, is trending," says freshman public relations major Oriana Davila.

With the rise of Instagram models and public figures like the Kardashians, the perfect image has become having curves in only the right places, which can be dangerous for people that do not fit that mold. According to a study by DoSomething.org, an organization that promotes healthy relationships and self-esteem for young people, only five percent of women naturally possess the body type portrayed by the media. However, people are challenging the idea of what it means to be beautiful, and it is not always synonymous with society's idea of perfection.

Fola Okeyemi, a freshman human development and family sciences major, sees curvy as being more than having perfect breasts and butts. "Their bodies, with perfect everything, do not make sense to me," Okeyemi says. "I see curvy as having a stomach."

Although a lot of people deny being curvy because of the stigma the term can sometimes carry, freshmen human development and family sciences major Mbayi Aben proudly accepts the label. "I see myself [as] curvy because I have a nice butt and top area, but also a little stomach, and I embrace it," Aben says. "People want to be slim thick, but I embrace all my thickness."

For others, curvy has no definition. It is about what a person chooses to identify themselves as, if they choose to identify as anything at all. "You can't take [curvy] and make it into a mold that someone has to fit," freshmen plan II and film major Nicole Ozuna says. She sees body types as fluid because nobody is truly the same. "It's about individuality," Ozuna says. "You are what you assign yourself to be."

There is no perfect body type for what it means to be curvy. "When I think of curvy, I don't think of Kylie [Jenner]," Ozuna says. "I think of people within the community I know, like Barbie Ferreira or women defying the norms of beauty, but we all know [Kylie] is considered perfect," Ozuna says.

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Kayla's look is flawlessly simple and perfect for the warmer weather.

"The most important thing is to celebrate and appreciate what we look like
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Plus-sized models like Barbie Ferreira and Ashley Graham have shown that fashion has room for all shapes and sizes. Cellulite and stretch marks are no longer left out of the conversation of what characteristics a woman's body should possess to be seen as beautiful. However, Ferreira and Graham are the exception, not the rule. According to a study by the Fashion Spot, only 1.4 percent of spring 2016 ads featured women above a size 12. Furthermore, according to Entity Magazine, Spring 2017 New York Fashion Week featured only 16 plus-size models. To put that into perspective, a study done by Refinery29 found that 67 percent of women wear a size 14 or higher.

But while plus-size representation in the mainstream media is slowly increasing for some, African-American curvy girls are often still excluded from the picture or hypersexualized. African-American women are often fetishized for their curves and are made to feel as though darker complexions have no place within the high fashion industry.

"I feel like if I wanted to do fashion, I would have to do sexualized commercial modeling," Aben says. "I would have to take pictures with no clothing on to be publicly noticed instead of me being praised for my other natural features."

"If nobody else is going to validate your beauty, you have to validate yourself."

This sentiment is shared by other women like freshman public health major Kayla Eboreime. "More and more, it's changing, but we celebrate skinny, light-skinned girls with a loose curl pattern, and I am the complete antithesis of that with my tight curl pattern, very dark skin and thick build," Eboreime says. For her, self-celebration and confidence is key in a world that tries to take away her personal worth. "If nobody else is going to validate your beauty, you have to validate yourself," Eboreime says.

This need for validation often feels crucial when growing up and can be difficult to come by when put in environment in which the people in the magazines or even around you are people you can identify with. "I struggled a lot in school because I was always the tallest one and biggest one, while all the other girls were petite and tiny," Davila says, reflecting on her youth. "My cousins would be like, 'You should wear this' and I would be like 'I can't wear that' and it made me feel horrible."

It wasn't until Davila started to rebel those harmful beauty standards that she learned the importance of accepting her beauty and her body. "You realize the person you don't want to be is who you actually are and who you're meant to be," Davila says.

Aben has had similar experiences. "When I was younger, I wanted to be slim because in my environment, everyone that was cute and popular was slim," Aben says. It was only when she moved to diverse areas and saw people like herself that she truly started not only accepting her body, but also loving it.

Regardless of background, confidence can be hard to come by and does not take place overnight. Personal value goes untaught and girls are made to feel a need to compare themselves to others.

"Younger girls should be taught that however you look is fine, so don't force it or hurt yourself trying to look like someone else," Okeyemi says.

From a young age, people are exposed to images that make them feel bad for not fitting into a perfect mold. "For a lot of people, it starts at puberty because they start looking in the mirror while thinking about buying bras or makeup and notice they don't fit the standards of beauty," Ozuna says.

These standards create false ideas of a need to look slim by wearing black or covering up your body when you are plus sized. It sets practices in place that can be not only be detrimental to a person's sense of style, but their sense of self worth.

In regards to following style rules, Ozuna says people around her would try to enforce nonexistent fashion rules that limit her self-expression. "It's very crippling and disheartening to live your life like that," she says.

To counteract these internalized misconceptions of beauty, Ozuna believes there are two routes to take. "One is to just remain unconfident, and that is a detriment to everything you do, or choose the route of liberation and not caring and realizing I am gorgeous and I am worthy," Ozuna says.

However, having such confidence can be frowned upon, especially regarding women.

Davila explains that she often feels beautiful, yet when asked about it, feels pressured to respond with

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Mbayi keeps her spring look fun and flirty!

Fola paired an off the shoulder top with a black skirt.

"Women are told not to take up space in any way—physically, emotionally and mentally, so when you say something like, 'I am beautiful, I'm smart, I'm ambitious,' you get judged,"

"I think I'm pretty but not beautiful" and questions "why do they make us feel bad about feeling good?"

"It has to do with taking up space," Ozuna says. "Women are told not to take up space in any way— physically, emotionally and mentally, so when you say something like, 'I am beautiful, I'm smart, I'm ambitious,' you get judged," Ozuna says.

Despite attempts to hold women down, knowing your self-worth, regardless of gender, is important. "In anything, but especially fashion, fake it to make it," Ozuna says. "If you exude confidence, people will

think you're wearing something well. You don't have to be big about it, but hold your head up, don't be ashamed in what you're wearing or who you are."

It is easy to get caught up and compare ourselves to others, especially when seeing actresses and models with certain traits, but as individuals everyone possesses something unique. Being different often has a negative connotation, but this uniqueness is what makes us who we are and should be proudly acknowledged. "The most important thing is to celebrate and appreciate what we look like in the moment because there is always something you have that someone wished they had, and to be mindful of speaking positivity and vibrancy over our bodies instead of dangerously condemning ourselves," Eboreime says. ❧

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