HUFFPOST WOMEN

I Like This Picture of My Cellulite: A 19-Year-Old's Journey to Self-Acceptance

Victoria Erickson – Student at The University of Iowa

I'm not the cute blonde on the left, but rather the more prominent, jean-jacket covered, cellulite-charging woman to the right.

And the first thing I thought of when I saw this picture was how HAPPY I look: I'm jubilant, radiant, fresh home from my first year of college and ready to celebrate with my hometown best friend. And I should've stopped there. It could have been enough to admire the photograph, to rejoice in the photographer's ability to capture the joy and carefree art of two friends catching up after a year apart. It should have been.

But instead, I let my subconscious take over. I let that little voice in the back of my head tell me that I wasn't good enough. I wasn't enough... or rather I was TOO much. I let the brainwashing, nerve-damaging thoughts seep in and overwhelm my mind, allowing the thoughts to poison my

spirit. My mentality went from You look HAPPY!! to Yeah, you look happy... but why? You're fat. Followed by, Don't believe me? Just look at that lump of cellulite you call a leg take over the shot and deplete the image of any beauty there may have been.

And the smile faded.

The disgusting part? I let it. I let my stomach sink, my chin drop, my eyebrows furrow and my spirit shrink. I let the negative thoughts brew until they reached a dangerous boiling point as I asked myself, Why didn't the photographer just edit that out?! and then, What should I do?! I wondered if it would be best to try to edit the cellulite myself, crop the picture from the waist down or just "hide" the photo from my timeline all together.

A lot of distress and worry over a photo. A photo that did nothing more than capture an image that presented itself. And that's when I realized that when you look at this photo, you might see the sorrow of imperfection, the impression of one (or two) many visits to the all-you-can-eat-university cafeteria, as I did at first glance.

OR you might see a jubilant young woman blessed with friendship and conversation, as I now choose to.

That's the wonderful part! I decided that it is what I -- independent, strong and mighty me -- decide to see, feel and believe that counts.

Because I'm 19 and I've had enough. No more body comparison and emotional affliction. No more distress caused by preconceived notions of body image. No more to any of it.

So what did I do? I decided that I loved the picture. I decide that it was a wonderful snapshot of my friendship and that it truly captured the essence of a rain-kissed stroll -- flaws and all! And most boldly, I decided to share it.

That's right. I decided that I love this honest and flawed picture so much so that I am going to embrace it, celebrate it and yes, share it. Because I decided I would fight my demon and embody it because I didn't -- and don't -- have the time or energy to let it wear and tear me down anymore. Because it's not important. And more so, because I hope when you look at yourself, whether in reflection or spirit, you do the same.

Because we're better than that.

And because it's actually OK to look at a photo and say yes, "I like this picture of my cellulite."