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Body problems get undressed

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New Jersey, Nov 8, 2007 (The Signal) - Shannon Cutts battled an illness for years without even realizing it. "For seven years I struggled with anorexia having no name for what I struggled with," she said. On Thursday night the musician, mentor and survivor shared her stories as well as an in-depth look into pop culture's influence on the perception of beauty in her talk "Beauty Undressed." The program was sponsored by Bod Squad.

Although her full-fledged eating disorder developed later on in life, Cutts partially attributes having a food problem to her being genetically predisposed to it. "The difference between disordered eating and an eating disorder in most cases is DNA," explained Cutts.

However, there were other factors that triggered the illness for her. She related her experiences of feeling abandoned by her family when her younger brother was born and being sexually abused at the age of six. At one point in middle school, Cutts was told by a former friend that she was too fat to be friends with her. Not eating was her way of coping with what had happened. From that point on, she dropped XX pounds and grew five inches. "I couldn't stop losing," Cutts said.

During her program, Cutts also examined why there is such a pressure to be thin. "We all grew up with Barbie," she said. She went on to explain that in actuality, compared to the average women, Barbie is a foot taller, her chest is four inches larger and her waist is five inches smaller. With those proportions, "It's very unlikely that Barbie would be able to walk upright," Cutts said, illustrating that this image of beauty is ingrained into young girls.

Later on, she compared and contrasted the curvaceous '50s model with the "clothes hanger" models of the '60s and onward. "Other woman started dying to look like a woman who didn't even want to look like herself," Cutts said of '60s supermodel Twiggy and her waifish frame that changed the way models have looked since then.

After 15 years of struggle, including developing bulimia at 18 and having a panic attack during her senior year of college, Cutts decided it was time to change. "I wanted my life back," Cutts said.

She likened her recovery to that of mathematician John Nash, whose battle with schizophrenia was the focus of the movie "A Beautiful Mind." She had to take charge of her mind whenever she felt like skipping a meal or purging. "We are more powerful than our minds," Cutts said. The key to recovery for her was her idea that "relationships replace eating disorders," and with the help of a mentor she was able to break free from the addiction.

Cutts advised everyone to avoid self-objectification - the "tendency to view one's body from outside in regarding physical attractiveness, sex appeal, measurements and weight." She emphasized that people need to step back and ask themselves, "Do I see beauty or do I just see me?"
