All About Confidence

Let me read you a riddle. This thing is more than something you have. It can be what you are, what you look for, and who you surround yourself with. It is all encompassing, and it leaks its way into every aspect of your life once you have it, or are trying to. It’s not black and white, and it is in itself a gray area that is a continuous, and never-ending journey. Out of guesses? No, it’s not some ghostly scary movie character. It’s confidence, and at the risk of sounding stupid, I put together this little intro in order to allude to confidence and its important, specifically amongst women, whilst remaining separated from the clichéd tropes of confidence being synonymous with wearing lipstick or smiling at yourself in the mirror.

Now I’m not saying those ways are incorrect or will not lead to confidence. (Honestly, wearing a banging red lipstick tends to do a lot for my self-efficacy), but I am trying to convey these thoughts about confidence without resorting to the typical and overstated methods. I want to discuss confidence in the rawest form. I want to look at why women don’t have confidence, how we can get it and just exactly how confidence shapes our lives and impacts them whether it be positively or negatively due to the lack of. I’ll talk about myself, my observations, but also, I want to look at the real woman. I want to understand the complexity that is confidence and why it shakes the grounds of the strongest of women.

Here’s my experience: confidence is an ever-changing and blurry concept in my life. The farthest back I can remember in my life is probably around 3 or 4 years old. I did not look in mirrors to check if my skin was clear, I did not even understand the concept of differently sized clothing. However, it is my belief that confidence can be instilled at the youngest of ages, and here is how it was present in my very early years, which oddly enough is still present until today. Confidence was simple then, it was purely choosing what made me happy because I valued my happiness: a simple philosophy. I wore a tutu religiously, because it made me happy and perhaps even made me feel *better* about myself…sound familiar?...a watered down version of making choices to chase confidence. Years later, wearing what I want and feel comfortable in is still an easy fix to feeling confident. But when did it become more complex?

I can remember insecurity. Of course, it comes simply at first, things such as, someone being better at coloring than you in kindergarten. But at what point, did insecurity reach deeper standard and become focused on mostly physical appearance and a comparison to others? I can remember first realizing differences in each other. This friend was taller than me…so were most of my friends. My instinct, at an age of perhaps 7 or 8, was to assume I was wrong. At that age, it’s as simple as the classic game of *which of these things do not belong*?. So, if you are different, that must be bad…and that leads to insecurity, and of course a lack of confidence. It’s hard to say, however, when it first intensified. It’s hard to say when confidence in oneself became an all-around battle that could not be won, and hopelessly could not be accepted.

I can remember not being able to see the good in me, and the strangest part of it was the girls and women around me couldn’t either. I remember at 14 when a friend said she cried every time she shopped for jeans, and a resounding agreeance and sympathy from similar experience was echoed by the surrounding girls. I was stunned that so many had such similar feelings. I truly thought it was just my own Achilles’ heel, but as time went on, and I grew up, I realized it was more so womanhood’s Achilles’ heel and not *just* mine.

So, when did it change? I think it was about understanding my value, which is still a struggle in itself. This is especially so, difficult for women in this society, one that dictates that value is deemed by appearances, and how you exist in conjunction with men. I won’t get into my feminist manifesto quite yet, but it is evident from a very young age that women and girls are supposed to be mere extensions of a male preoccupation or idea. So, yes, that being said, the struggle came alongside a society that appeared to say, ‘your worth is cannot be dictated *by* you’.

Having your worth dictated by others appears to be a common downfall amongst many. Alongside this, many women even find a loss of self along the way, which leads to a loss of confidence. “I think the way I lost a lot of confidence was by acting against my values. I’ve done things that I knew were wrong and the more I did that the more confidence I lost…I’ve started to regain my confidence by speaking my truth and thinking about my values. This helps me be confident because I know I’m trying to be the person I want to be.”

For myself, I finally came to a point where I realized my value was much, much more than an appearance, a name, a perception created by others…It was about *my* existence and what I could do with it. As I asked the women in my life what confidence meant to them, my mother said “For me, my confidence grew as I gained knowledge. My confidence never depends on others’ words. It’s inside of me.” And that is where one learns to squander the idea that others’ perceptions are dictators of value, and furthermore a cause of confidence. It is negative perceptions that can cause confidence to falter, no matter who it is from… So, focus on the one perception you can change: your own.

“Just fake it! No one can tell the difference, and eventually you won’t be able to either. One day you’ll realize you’re not even faking it anymore” Maybe in your core you understand your flaws, but having confidence is about recognizing those flaws as not being as detrimental to your character as you think, and even sometimes as something that society has only *made* you feel is detrimental to your character.

Confidence is truly an ever-changing thing, not due to others’ perceptions directly changing your confidence, but by their opinions changing *your* own. How do we overcome this then? We think. We feel. We question. We consider. Most importantly, we *know.* Know that your abilities are your own and important. Know what decisions will lead to your happiness. Know about how illogical constructs and standards impact your own perception of self. And it’s important to know that no matter what no one has the *right* to deter you from confidence, even yourself.