

BEDA
National
**Weight Stigma
Awareness**Week
September 26-30

I said, "Well, I don't think I am like most nurses, all nurses are different..." when he stormed away disgusted. That is when I realized he had intended the comment to be directed directly TO me.

Oh.

I was in the middle of the store. I couldn't leave the table. There was no one to cover for me. I couldn't do. I couldn't let them come. I wouldn't let the tears that were welling up in my eyes slide down my face. I was not going to let this get to me. I hear it though. At least once a day. Those words. I don't beat myself up over it but the residual sticks in my head. It was just this blatant attack to a physical attribute. An attack that signal his insecurities and mentally disturbed issues, true, but an attack non the less.

Another one, another day:

"Do you have high blood pressure?"

"I'm sorry?" I ask

"Do you have high blood pressure? You look like you have high blood pressure."

a small exchange ensues but it's not until she is gone that I realize that she made an assumption that because I was heavier, I must have high blood pressure. Last check it was in the 120's over 70's.

These people who feel the need to go out of their way to point out the obvious are...dealing with issues themselves, obviously. I just don't like that it's training generations to accept this type of behavior and act out on it. Discrimination in ANY form is just not cool and needs to be nipped in the bud. Negative reinforcement doesn't work for anyone. It's been proven. Hatred and Rage is all you breed with stigma. It needs to stop. Now.

Submitted by Nicole

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Home should have been a safe place.

I was a little kid, always on guard in my own house with my own family, made to feel uncomfortable in my own skin...just waiting. The message was loud and clear. I was smart, sweet, well behaved. I had a "very pretty face", blond curls, bright blue eyes. But, "What a shame...". I was too fat. Loud and clear and heart breaking; I was not acceptable, as I was.

This message, this weight stigma, was ever-present. It came from my Mom, who had her own body issues, and from an unhappy older brother who clearly saw me as an interloper in his world. He seemed compelled to carry his anger and his bullying into our school. He'd yell, "Hi Tubs", whenever our classes passed in the hallways, as if to distance himself from this shamefully fat little girl to whom he was unfortunately related. By junior and senior high school he'd gotten all of his friends, in school, at home, even at summer camp, to call me "Ray", after Ray Nitschke, a middle linebacker for the Green Bay Packers.

The message was also delivered by my mother's mother, who regularly baked cakes and cookies to express her love for her family, then, sternly stated, in front of everyone, that I was only to eat "one". My grandfather was equally direct, Over and over again, publically, he offered to pay me one dollar for every pound I could lose.

For me, weight stigma started at home. I never felt safe. Is there any wonder why I was vulnerable to developing a binge eating disorder?

Ellen Shuman serves as the Vice President of BEDA, The Binge Eating Disorder Association, and is a Life Coach who specializes in emotional and binge eating recovery. She is the founder of A Weigh Out Life Coaching & Acoria Eating Disorder Treatment, www.aveighout.com. She is also the Co-Chair of the Academy for Eating Disorders Special Interest Group on "Health at Every Size", ellen@aveighout.com

Nicole

A self-proclaimed nutritionist came up to me, where I was giving flu shots, and asked if I was a Registered Nurse.

"Yes, I am"

"Why is it that nurses eat so much? Don't they know it's bad for business?"

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and me in the 1970's, I thought I was fat – and was always trying to diet. I don't think anyone meant anything personally or meant harm, but that is how I took it all.



Submitted by Becky Mollet

Ellen

I just wanted to feel safe...and loved.

I longed to find some place safe from bullying. I wanted to stop expecting the next comment to be about what foods I should or should not be eating. I didn't want to be accused daily, "Did you eat ice cream at snack time today?" I wanted to climb under the exam table when our pediatrician, at my mother's unrelenting insistence, acquiesced and prescribed Dexedrine, speed, for a totally healthy, albeit chubby, 8 year old girl.

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The logo for BEDA National Weight Stigma Awareness Week features a purple wavy line at the top. Below it, the text "BEDA National" is in a small, green, sans-serif font. The main title "Weight Stigma Awareness Week" is in a larger, green, sans-serif font, with "Weight Stigma" on one line and "Awareness Week" on the next. Below the title, the dates "September 26-30" are written in a purple, sans-serif font.

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little were better than big and large. I had another grandmother (who favored boys) who told me I had to be careful not to hurt my brother because he was so little and I was so big. We were only 2 1/2 years apart in age.

Other incidents that came to mind were:

- When I was eleven and went to the fair with a babysitter they wanted to charge me full price. The sitter teasingly told them they "make them big Up North." It truly was a cute comment that I love recalling to this day, however I know it added to my ideas about my size. (By the way my babysitter was fat - and I loved her to pieces - she was like a second mom to me.)
- When my parents made their rounds to bars on Sunday afternoons and my brother and I were along, one of my pleasures was being able to get bags of potato chips. The bartender once commented that I didn't really need another bag of chips - something to the effect that I would get too fat.
- My mother always talked about weight and weighed herself daily so I did not know that was not normal.
- When I asked if I was fat I was told I was "hippy".
- Some boys walking by when I was jumping rope yelled out "elephant legs". Again I took that to mean fat.
- By the time I was 14, I was 5' 7" and 124 lbs - I thought that was fat!
- When my grandparents made comments like I was too big to pick up and swing around like my brother, I took that as fat.
- When I was young I can remember arguing with my dad about getting the last pork chop at dinner time. :)
- My nick name was apple cheeks cause of my round face.
- There was a boy that liked me in 7th grade. I was telling my mother's friend about him but that I didn't want to go steady with him because he was fat. My mom's friend immediately told me that wasn't a reason. That was the first time I realized that saying someone was fat or not liking them for that reason was not right.
- My best friend in my adult years was fat - she was an amazing person - everyone wanted to be around her. I always marveled at how she handled her size like it didn't matter (I realize now she understood that her size was only a part of who she was).

I remember these comments to this day. I realize now these things contributed to my perception of how I viewed myself. I remember thinking small and blonde was better than big and brunette :) - so silly! Even at the time of this picture, my brother

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But the times that made me feel not just “*not great*,” but hideous and repulsive, happened after what I felt were mutually enjoyable sexual experiences. I had spirit. I had “skills.”

“You’d be great if you lost...”

I had been had. Funny it hadn’t been an issue a few minutes earlier when I was being grabbed in the throes of passion.

It’s difficult to remember being the person unable to reply to the lover, “It didn’t seem to be a problem five minutes ago.” Or to the doctor, “My weight has nothing to do with the reason I am here.” It has taken time, work, laughter, and support to no longer apologize for who I am or colluding with others’ judgments. But I have changed. I can say with confidence that if I was the person then that I am now, I’d have looked Miss Peterson in her eyes and said, “The reason you don’t want me on this squad is because you don’t like the way I look in the uniform, it has nothing to do with my ability to execute the moves.”

Or looked at the lover and said, “You’d be great if you’d shut the f*&# up.

Well, maybe nothing quite that confrontational. I prefer peaceful interactions. More realistically I see myself being able to offer the simple reply of, “Who asked you?” It is without a doubt a change for the great.

Submitted by Deah Schwartz, PhD

Becky

When I was a child I grew quickly - I was often told I was a “big” girl. I interpreted that to mean fat and fat in my family was looked upon as a bad thing. My grandmother whom I lived with the first 2 1/2 years of my life was fat. Somehow it must of been pointed out often because I always remember looking at her and thinking “fat” when I looked at her, as far back as I can remember. Yet she was such a special part of my life - she was a wonderful grandma to me. I loved her very much. She used to tell me stories of how I would stand at the refrigerator door when I could barely talk and say “Meat” - which meant a piece of cheese or meat. I somehow got the impression that fat and big were not the preferred thing to be. I passed my mother up in size around the age 10. I also had a brother who was quite small in stature for his age. I was compared to him and my mom often. I don't think it would have been a problem except that I already had the concept that small and

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Unlearning the weight stigmas (including believing that slightly-underweight looked better on me and others than being a healthy weight) that I had accepted as truth for so long was absolutely one of the best life-achievements I have accomplished.

Interestingly enough, now recovered, I receive a different weight-stigma –because of my natural body size –which happens to be what others see as “thin”. But I do not feel the need to defend my body size and shape now. When people get to know me they see beyond what society sees as a body size. And they see that I am healthy – body, mind and spirit.

I am no longer stocky. I am no longer thin. I am simply: Kathleen who is beautiful because she is healthy and alive. And that is what I see in others: all human forms are perfectly beautiful because they are alive.

Submitted by Kathleen MacDonald

Deah

You'd Be Great If...

...not that I remember ever asking anyone, “What would make me great?”

I have scoured my mind, looking for one scenario when I actually asked someone, “What do you think would make me great?” I came up with the grand total of NONE! And yet my mind is filled with occasions when I am being told,
“You'd be great if you lost weight.”

I heard this from Miss Peterson, when I tried out for the Booster Squad. My jumps were perfect, my splits dead on. I had spirit, I had physical flexibility, I had fat. I didn't make the team... **“You'd be great if you lost....”**

I was riding a horse; galloping around the corral, red hair flying. I was free, I was flying, no really, suddenly I was flying through the air...I was flat...on my back. I went to the doctor and was told that I would be fine because I was strong, but...
“You'd be great if you lost...”

“And the horse would appreciate it also.” I was stunned, hurt and never rode a horse again out of guilt that I might be too oppressive a presence on the saddle.



Fran

“I grew up with a Mom that was morbidly obese from compulsive overeating. Through out her life she experienced a lot of hurt and discrimination because of her weight. Discrimination and plain ignorance ultimately killed her. In May of 2008 she was admitted to the hospital with shortness of breathe. She received a blood transfusion and seemed to be recovering. The doctors did not know why she needed a transfusion. One doctor thought a bone marrow test should be done but then quickly dismissed the idea because of my Mom's size. The doctor even joked about her being to big...laughing that she (the doctor) was so petite & getting to my Mom's hip would be too hard because of her size. In the end that test would of proved beneficial. Less then a year later my Mom died suddenly from complications to amlyoidosis. A disease that would have been detected with a bone marrow test.”

Submitted by Fran Erbe

Kathleen

When I was younger the rules were: thin is pretty, fat is ugly.

From the tender age of two until I was 12, adults seemed to be in awe of my thin body. I had one neighbor count my ribs every time I saw her, and another neighbor who, when I complained that I wanted rounder hips, said, “Trust me, one day you’ll miss those hip bones.”

The body ‘compliments’ stopped when I entered puberty and I gained weight and fat –natural life processes that I didn’t think of as “bad” until others around me started to tell me that this new weight looked “bad” on me. One day my mom called me her “stocky daughter” and I was mortified.

Because of comments like those, I spent the next 16 years of my life on diets, exercising and speaking self-loathing body thoughts. And for 16 years I denied my body its genetically natural weight and shape.

It was a miserable existence.



Stories

Marsha

"I grew up a round kid in a very thin family. Never really large, just had more fat on my body than my siblings. Often it was developmental, prior to a growth spurt. But from my earliest memories, I can recall at the least being teased by my family, called Marshmallow (playing off my name), and at the worst, being told I was too fat and should be careful about eating certain foods. It's probably needless to say that I became conscious of my body at a very early age.

The trouble really began when I was in high school, however. Although in previous years along with my best friend I had spent hours decrying the fact that I was "too fat," high school is when I began dieting. This was in the 60s before the awareness of eating disorders had grown. But my first dieting experience of eating one orange a day for several months, followed by a series of other weight control attempts over the next few years finally culminated in developing bulimia, which plagued me for almost 10 years and still affects my health today.

I began my road to recovery by learning how to feed myself well, eating what I wanted in a way that made me feel well. But it took me many, many years to overcome my struggles with body image. The weight stigma I experienced as a young child cemented in my mind the idea that my body was inferior. Hence, I was inferior. The negative impact this has had on my life has been profound.

It has been my life's work to change this scenario for future generations. The Weight Stigma Awareness Week offers a tremendous opportunity to make a difference by getting to the root of the problem -- the lack of awareness that healthy bodies come in all shapes and sizes. Kudos to the Binge Eating Disorder Association for taking on this vitally important issue."

Submitted by Marsha Hudnall, MS, RD