

Fatphobia throughout a Life

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The way most of us are conditioned, our bodies are not supposed to be ours. Whether it is a conversation about abortions or debating what clothes we should be wearing, feminine-presenting bodies are constantly under scrutiny. Fatphobia and its surrounding rhetoric is another example of the entitlement others have on why a particular body should not exist and how it should conform to their rules.

I'm 19 years old and I've been using the term *fat* for years now. For me it's a descriptor that perfectly encompasses my body. I do want to recognize that I am a small fat, which gives me a privilege other fat folks don't have. I also want to acknowledge that as a black person I experience additional discrimination. No conversation about fatphobia can be had without the understanding that racism plays an integral role in the policing of bodies and size and this has influenced my experience as a fat person navigating the world. Fatphobia relies on ageism, sexism, ableism, and more and to ignore any of these truths would be an act of supreme ignorance.

Soon after beginning one of my first work experiences, I found a memo sent out to all of my coworkers describing my body. My title went from being a student down the hall to "another big girl." This was a professional communication outlining protocols for the workplace. The managers felt my size was just as important as the new Covid safety rules and more important than spelling my name right. My body became inescapable. As if it wasn't already.

As children in Canadian society, we are taught from a very young age to hate fatness. As a fat child, society taught me to hate myself. I struggled with disordered eating, body dysmorphia, and depression. During the formative years of my life, I would stay at home waiting for my body to shrink hoping that I would be accepted, not only by my



peers but by myself as well. Now, it genuinely pains me to see the time I wasted hoping I would change when it was the world that needed changing.

I was lucky enough to find friends with like minds. One of note is Venus B. I was able to talk to Venus about fatphobia and her relationship with her own body. Venus noted her first experience with fatphobia was extremely early in her life and also from someone very important to her. "The first experience of fatphobia that I remember was from my own mother. When I was around six, she told me that she wanted me to grow 'up' rather than 'out.' At the time I didn't realize how much of an effect that sentence

would have on me for the rest of my life. I would say I didn't start to have problems with my body until I started kindergarten. Before that, I don't think I was old enough to understand that my body did not fit society's standards.

"Once I got to elementary school and I was around other kids, I started to realize that I was different. Not only that, but other people made me realize that I was different. Gym teachers would pick on me, kids would call me fat derogatorily, doctors would tell me I was obese and unhealthy, etc. It didn't help that I would experience fatphobia from my own family members and be forced to go on diets by those family members. It is no surprise that I developed an eating disorder and body dysmorphia at a very young age and carried it to adulthood.

"To tell the complete truth, my perception of my body has gone downhill over the course of my life. I can't count the times that I have stared into the mirror and hated everything that I saw. As I've gotten older and more self-aware, I've continued to realize how my body will never be accepted and my body dysmorphia has worsened. My perception

and expectations of my body differ from other people's because I am my harshest critic. My mind contains every bad thing that anyone has said about my body that I have internalized. The same negative sentences run through my mind when I look in the mirror, which I'm sure don't run through other people's minds when they look at me. No matter what positive thing anyone says about my body, I can't bring myself to believe them. I don't think I'll ever be able to see myself how others see me."

Venus's story is hard to hear for many reasons. Venus is an amazing person and if you could see her, you would be confused as to why she feels so negatively about her appearance. But Venus, like many others, has been conditioned by practically every person in and out of her life to hate her body with a passion. From doctors to family to media, Venus was told her body was wrong and unfortunately, she believed it.

I feel grateful that even at the ripe age of 19 I have figured out how to love my body unconditionally. Perhaps it's the contrarian in me but after years of being told I wasn't right,



I just wanted to say “fuck off my body isn’t for you!” At one point I began saying to myself: “Who does it benefit when I hate my body?” I knew the answer intellectually but emotionally it took a lot longer to stick, until one day it finally did. I will always have my ups and downs. I will always have days where I curse every god for putting me in this vessel but now, I know that it is not about me. It’s about how society has failed me and others like me. How can I hate my body when my body has always been there for me? How can I hate the vehicle that can take me anywhere I want to go? The heart that allows me to dance to my favorite songs? How could I ever hate my belly that perfectly balances bowls of food on it—I can’t.

I am young. Most of my life is ahead of me and I know as life goes on, I will continue to face resentment and aversion from the general public regarding my body. I will also face systemic discrimination through medical care and hiring processes. Me having a good relationship with my body will do little to help combat the systemic discrimination and adversity I as a fat person will face in our society, but I am ready to fight. I will fight for the children in my life who at 3 years old already somehow know that calling someone fat is one of the worst insults there is and I will fight for people like Venus who has been attacked by society and still must live with the lasting damage.

Unlike Venus, I am hopeful that things will change. Anti-fatphobia communities have been thriving online and “body positivity” is becoming mainstream. It will take a long time for individuals to completely unlearn the fatphobic rhetoric that has been drilled into our minds since childhood but hopefully one day, fat people as a whole will not only be able to accept our bodies but also have our bodies accepted. Finally.

Renée Tiller is a BIPOC student at York University. As the first youth representative on the Inanna Publications board of directors, Renée’s experience working with disabled, LGBTQ+ folks, and inner-city youth influences her activism greatly. The intersectionality of identities is a main focus of her work.

ILONA MARTONFI

Trümmerfrauen (Rubble Women)

On Walhallastrasse,
women dressed in kerchiefs
cotton aprons, old shoes

at breadlines and burying corpses
waiting to buy cabbage, potatoes
with their ration coupons

rubble, intact rooms,
gutted silhouettes
the old Messerschmitt airport
war refugees from Budapest
we live in Halle # 7
windowless factory hangar

by the Moosgraben creek,
Bavarian chalk hills, bomb craters.

Purple wild irises
bog nunnery manor

cleaning red bricks,
my mother, Magda.

Ilona Martonfi is an editor, poet, curator, and activist. Author of four poetry books, the most recent Salt Bride (Inanna, 2019) and The Tempest (Inanna, 2022). Writes in journals, anthologies, and seven chapbooks. Her poem “Dachau on a Rainy Day” was nominated for the 2018 Pushcart Prize. Curator of Visual Arts Centre Reading Series and Argo Bookshop Reading Series. QWF 2010 Community Award.