

SEEING MY BODY DIFFERENTLY

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When I was eight years old, a doctor shamed my mother for putting apple juice in my lunch. He told her it was making me fat. And then it was like feeding me poison. He prescribed diet soda to be placed in my grade 3 lunch box instead.

Over the decade that followed, my experience of my body was accessed through shame, hunger, and pain. Gym class was a public torture spectacle. My body absorbing the violence smacks of the first few minutes of dodgeball. You're out.

Between the ages of eight to eighteen, I was put on doctors supervised diets, a sugar free diet, Weight Watchers, the Scarsdale Diet, and a meal plan that mimicked the Canada Food Guide without any grains or bread products.

I was sent to school with half a belly full of lunch, because I was told I didn't need any more food despite still being hungry. I didn't understand what was so offensive about my presence that I had to make myself smaller. I thought kids were supposed to grow. But not me. I was put on diets before I was responsible for cooking my own food.

It was made abundantly clear that the way my body wanted to grow was wrong. I wish someone had told me that my appetite was sacred. I wish someone had told me that I was good at eating, and that feeding myself was something to be proud of rather than ashamed of.

I've been all kinds of weights, all kinds of sizes, but I don't remember a time in my childhood after the age of eight when a doctor or family member told me I was good enough. It was like every photograph of my body was a before

photograph waiting for some miracle diet transformation. My size is something I've had to answer to, explain, justify, and apologize for.

Now as an adult, I see little girl bodies plump up before puberty, and I couldn't imagine telling those bodies to diet.

Is it really that complicated to just accept bodies, assume shapes that are healthy and natural? Is fat really all that bad?

If someone had told me sexism is the reason my body was being criticized, the violence and irrational logic at stake would have been visible to me. But because fat phobia was labeled as good for my health, I thought I deserved it. I needed to continue to find a reason why I was so big.

It would take me years to understand how this logic reflects a belief in the myth of whiteness. That invisibility is a cultural belief families like mine cling to in order to legitimize our wealth.

As a fat girl, my body was marked, and markedness is very threatening to waspy middle class sensibilities. It's acceptable so long as the marked person works towards self improvement, but to reject invisibility as a cultural value is to reject a foundational part of the cultural system.

When I stop looking for an explanation for my size, I begin to see my body differently. Maybe my body loves the fat it's created, and relies on it for the stamina to write my PH.D dissertation. Maybe what makes me metabolize calories slowly is exactly what helps me metabolize ideas slowly, sinking into them, exploring their nuance, translating them across different theoretical paradigms. Maybe the long, meandering conversations my friends rely on me to carry make up the kind of magic the slowest runner in gym class was built to offer the world.

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When I pass other fat people on the street, I send a silent prayer their way. I want to whisper in their direction: I believe you. I know you're not doing anything wrong. I know you eat healthy food. I know you don't deserve any of the violence. I know you encounter it every day.