

Playing It Small: We Can Do Better

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I've danced around this topic for quite some time. Not only because it's sensitive, but because it's something that must be articulated precisely and defended compassionately. And, truthfully, the only person I've ever discussed it with is my sister, for fear of being misunderstood by anyone else. You can thank her for this post because she's the one who encouraged me to tackle it.

I'm nervous in writing this because I think it's incredibly important, but also because I want to get it **right**.

The fourth-wave feminist movement (circa 2012) has been going strong, and don't mistake me, it's great. But there's this antagonistic counterpart to women's rights that we kind of ignore. The crazy part is that, as women, it's entirely our responsibility to fix it. Well...actually, it *is* us.



The following are various things that have been said to me, or said about me that I think warrant a conversation. Please approach with the mindset that the ultimate point I want to make is much larger than these trivial statements.

- I was recently in a situation where I later learned that other women were negatively discussing something I was wearing as inappropriate.
 - I was wearing loose, non-spandex shorts of a reasonable length in order to teach exercise outside in 85 degree weather. A fellow male instructor had shorts on as well.
- I have been a part of a conversation that trails off to two other people discussing the clothes size of another woman present in the room, yet very audibly.
 - Whatever size pants you wear, this is not cool. Don't do this to people.
- "You've never been overweight, I can tell."
 - *Girl*. You don't know me. And for the record, I have been overweight. Take note: beer and the pressures of grad school is a friend to no waistline.

- “Why aren’t you eating any of this [avocado]? This is healthy.”
 - Mind you, this was a regular recurrence from a specific person. Every time I would eat around this person, my meal choice was analyzed and often times accompanied by a comment on why she loved eating—usually bacon—and how I was missing out. It was as if she felt compelled to defend her own lunch.
- “You’re lucky, you can eat anything you want.”
 - No. No I cannot. Plus – we *are* what we eat. A healthy weight doesn’t always translate to actual health.
- “Here, you’re skinny, you can eat this stuff.”
 - [Shovels 7/8 of her cobbler onto my already 1.5 servings so I now have a marathon’s worth of saturated fat on my plate.]
 - Also—skinny is a pejorative adjective and don’t pretend like you don’t know it.

I’ve broken out in an anxious sweat as I’m typing at my computer. I loathe these situations. And I loathe talking about them. I shouldn’t. But I do. Here’s why:

When these things are said, they are said derogatorily, almost accusingly. I’ve witnessed this secondhand as well. Other women reproachfully making comments to other women about their weight or figure (whether it’s healthy or unhealthy; big or little; pretty or not pretty).

My worry in writing this article is that you will assume my grievance is another obtuse rant on how my privileged little feelings are hurt when someone calls me skinny. **Cause that ain’t it.** (Well...I am totally aware of my own privilege, but my rant isn’t about *me*, per se; it’s about how women treat other women).

And friends: ***We can do better.***

Sure, some of these things can be legitimately hurtful, but they’re much more so humiliating. I never know how to respond and just wish the conversation would end immediately. For some convoluted reason, I feel compelled to be apologetic about it; to shrink out of view; *to make myself small.*

Why do we so often need to focus on physical attributes of women? Aren’t the latest headlines evidence enough that the media is doing plenty of that for us? Whatever size you are, why are we—as women—making it a *thing*? Why do we bring it into the arena of conversation amongst ourselves? How much of this deprecating culture are we reinforcing in our own interactions with other women? And in doing so, how much of our own energy is being wasted on this negative, subconscious self-preconception that our physical size is the most important thing about us?

Since when do “skinny” people not have to worry about their health? Weight is not necessarily a reflection of wellness. Health should be about *being* healthy, not looking healthy on the outside. **They’re not the same thing.**

So, *what are we doing?* At a time when equal rights are at the forefront of our social agenda, why are we hypocritically bringing other women down while also claiming to be a proponent of gender equality? Even outside the topic of physical appearance, we often approach other women defensively and judgmentally.

Here’s the worst part of this article. I’m not an innocent party.

I've looked at some celebrity's social media and flippantly said something like "she seems so superficial". When in fact, after reading through her posts I find out she's endearingly hilarious and a fierce proponent of other women. I then become an avid follower of her Instagram account, oblivious to my own capricious inclinations.

Here's another version of that on a much grander scale.

When I was in undergrad, I lived with my best friend for a couple of years. Important to note: I am not the easiest person to live with. I'm an introvert. I like to be in silence and by myself 98.2% of the time. People doing normal things like watching TV and loudly grinding coffee will wear on my limited capacity for stimuli and then my brain will just explode (to be fair, I've gotten much, much better about this. Only took 30 years).

My best friend is truly one of the kindest, most gracious people that I know. She's a rare breed of person that gives ceaselessly, just because that's who she is at her core; she doesn't expect anything in return. She's also the opposite of me – extroverted and outgoing. Probably part of the reason we're best friends.



Best friend and I at her surprise 30th birthday weekend.

One day, in the midst of our residence together, I'd been exposed to one too many loud noises and my tolerability synapses had collapsed entirely. I texted my sister—official bearer of all my ranting—and launched into this huge tirade of nonsensical revulsion with my roommate, who was merely existing peacefully. I said something like "she coughs ridiculously" and "she acts like she's super sick and she's *NOT*, Susan. SHE'S NOT."

That is a crazy nonsense. A brain unraveling.

So I send this massive novel of a text voicing all of my crucial grievances, like how her breathing patterns are displeasing to me. I glance away for a second and then look back at my phone and I'd sent it to my bestie, not my sibling.

I panicked, frantically texted the nature of the situation to my sister, and desperately tried to elicit some low form of sympathy. She swiftly and compassionately replied, "omg lol. that's hilarious."

Thanks Susan.

BFF appropriately responds with, "Dude. WTF?".

I think I was so stunned and ashamed by the sheer idiocy of my own actions that I tried to say the text was about someone else. Which just added to the big pile of stupid in which I was rapidly drowning.

I went home immediately and tried to explain that I'm clinically irrational and asked for forgiveness, which she readily gave because she's all gracious and a much nicer person than me. And she knows I'm a mixed bag of idiosyncrasies, so that helped too.

As internalizing folk are wont to do, I freaked out over the incident. All I could think was *WHAT is wrong with me? Who does this??*

I'm an anxious and sometimes depressed person, but I'm not *that* person. At least, I desperately wanted not to be.

In life, if you're wise (or just keenly aware of your own foolishness), you'll learn from a traumatic event and craft a plan to ensure it is never repeated. Lucky for me, the handful of times that I've genuinely hurt someone I love, I'm so gravely disturbed by my effortless ability to be such a jerk that I learn my lesson pretty quickly.

wise¹

/wīz/ 

adjective

adjective: **wise**; comparative adjective: **wiser**; superlative adjective: **wisest**

1. *Keenly aware of your own foolishness*

From the Infamous Text Experience, I developed a mantra that I still use today. Whenever I build up an unwarranted amount of agitation with someone, I try to remind myself: *She's on your side.*

She's on your side. She's on your side.

I mean...it's the truth. She *is* on my side. And chances are that whatever female you're prematurely analyzing, she wants to be on your side too. What are we if we can't give another human that benefit of the doubt?

Our world isn't so crowded that anybody should be made to feel small, no matter what your size.

I hope you liked this [article](#). Feel free to hit the blog to find more stories of me making a fool of myself at emilymenzer.com/blog.