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Fat People Exist

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Fat People Exist

Abstract

A couple weeks ago, I closed the stall door behind me in a Patrick Hall bathroom and was greeted by this sign. I quickly scanned the text, smiled at the picture, and had one of those warm, fuzzy, faith-in-humanity-has-been-restored kinds of moments.

Keywords

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, weight, obesity, public image, self-esteem

Disciplines

Sociology | Sociology of Culture

Comments

Surge is a student blog at [Gettysburg College](#) where systemic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at [surgegettysburg.wordpress.com](#) Through stories and reflection, these blog entries relate personal experiences to larger issues of equity, demonstrating that -isms are structural problems, not actions defined by individual prejudice. We intend to popularize justice, helping each other to recognize our biases and unlearn the untruths.

SURGE

[VERB] : to move suddenly or powerfully forward or upward

FAT PEOPLE EXIST

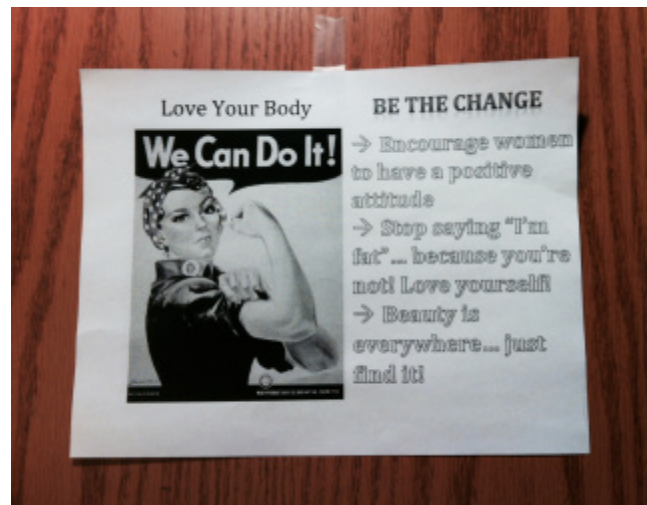
April 28, 2014

A couple weeks ago, I closed the stall door behind me in a Patrick Hall bathroom and was greeted by this sign. I quickly scanned the text, smiled at the picture, and had one of those warm, fuzzy, faith-in-humanity-has-been-restored kinds of moments.

Then, I took a closer look at the second bullet point, and that warm fuzzy moment came to an abrupt end. "Stop saying 'I'm fat'... because you're not!" it reads. "Love yourself!"

Though I'm sure the anonymous creator(s) of these posters had only the best of intentions, I have a few reminders for them and for the people who would agree with these sentiments.

- 1) Fat people exist. That statement should not be controversial. You would never deny that thin people exist. People have diverse body types.
- 2) You don't know who is going to walk into this bathroom stall. Chances are that a fat person has walked into that stall and read your sign telling them not to call themselves fat. But they are fat. If someone said to you "I'm skinny," you would never say "No, you're not!"
- 3) "Fat" is not a dirty word. It is a word that describes bodies, which are all beautiful. If your sign said "Stop saying 'I'm ugly'" or "Stop saying 'I'm stupid'" or "Stop saying 'I'm a bad person,'" then I wouldn't have the slightest problem with it. But by telling people to stop calling themselves fat, you are implying that fat is an inherently bad thing to be.
- 4) Fat is not an inherently bad thing to be.



5) By placing your call for the reader to “Love yourself” after your command to “Stop saying ‘I’m fat’ (and your ignorant assertion that “you’re not!”), you make it seem like being fat and loving oneself are in opposition to each other, like fat people cannot or should not love themselves.

6) Fat people can and should love themselves.

7) It never fails to make people writhe in discomfort when a fat person, especially a friend, says “I’m so fat!” It wouldn’t make you uncomfortable if your pale friend announced “I’m so pale!” or your tall friend declared “I’m so tall!” People calling themselves fat shouldn’t be any different; it’s just another physical attribute. By telling people to stop calling themselves fat, you are reinforcing the idea that fat people shouldn’t be allowed to talk about their bodies.

8) Fat people should be allowed to talk about their bodies.

9) Fat women will never “have a positive attitude” if you continue silencing them, shaming them, and trying to convince them that they don’t exist.



10) Fat people should not be silent. They should not be ashamed. And their existence should not be erased.

I’ve had numerous discussions about racism, sexism, and heterosexism this past year at Gettysburg College, but the moment I bring up “fat hate” or “thin privilege,” people scoff. They cite fake concern for the health of fat people, ignoring the fact that being overweight decreases a premenopausal woman’s risk of developing breast cancer and lowers the mortality risk for heart disease patients. They talk about the “obesity epidemic,” acting like fatness is a disease that should

be eradicated from the population. They talk about clothes being “flattering” or “unflattering,” not realizing that the whole idea of “flattering clothing” stems from the attitude that fat people need to disguise the true nature of their bodies.

I am tired of the phrase “freshman fifteen” and the shame that goes with putting it on. I am tired of hearing my friends argue over whose tray everyone’s going to put their dishes on because it’s embarrassing to be the person with the highest stack of plates. I am tired of watching girls at the gym standing in front of the mirror, pinching the soft places and wrinkling their noses in self-disgust. I am tired of hearing the girls in the next room talk about trying diet pills. I am tired of reading statistics about the astronomical rates of eating disorders in sororities.

I am sick of double-chins in Facebook pictures ruining entire days for me. I am sick of my self-confidence being based on which hole in my belt I use each morning. I am sick of feeling bad for my third (and fourth, and fifth, and sometimes sixth) Servo cookie. I am sick of feeling guilty because I chose to hang out with friends instead of going to the gym.

I am sick and tired of fat negativity.

Whether you like it or not, fat people exist. Fat people wear shorts in hot weather. Fat people talk about their bodies. And fat people are beautiful. Fat people and thin people are all just that: people. They’re just different sizes. And that’s okay.

So the next time I look in the mirror, I might say "I'm fat." But in the very same breath, I will say that I love myself.

This article was influenced and informed by Abigail C. Seguy's wonderful book *What's Wrong With Fat?*

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<http://surgegettysburg.wordpress.com/2014/04/28/fat-people-exist/>