



November 2020 NAAFA Newsletter

Holiday Tips for Thin Allies

by *Dan Oliverio*



Where is Our Place at the Table?

The difficulty of being a good ally is that our voice is the most likely to be heard but the least likely to represent the people we're fighting for. We may be at the center of other marginalized communities, but as a thin ally of fat people, we do not

experience their specific stigma, trauma, and

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oppression, which ironically is why our voice gets heard more than theirs. Shocker: the voices of marginalized people get marginalized the most when they talk about how they are marginalized. As allies, our job is to center and amplify the voices of those who tend not to be heard and create safety for those who may fear to speak.

Fighting the Good Fight

As much as we'd like to give fatphobic aunt Matilda a piece of our mind, the holiday dinner table may not be the best place to release your Kraken. More importantly, when we allies take up the fight on behalf of the fat person who is sitting right next to us, it pushes them even further to the margins. They are left being fought about, not fought for. It makes them a bystander of their own experience, playing the sidekick while we pose as the hero. If you want to express outrage or upset, talk about you and your experience, not someone else's.

As allies, we want to make life better for the fat people in our lives, but during the holidays especially, we cannot assume that we know what "making life better" looks like to them in a particular situation. In the lives of marginalized people, there is a constant consideration of tactics to deal with ignorance, indignities, and hostilities--tactics that broadly fall into three categories: confront, mitigate, or avoid. People have different communication styles and preferences. Even married couples, for example, sometimes have opposite communication styles. One person is brash; the other is diplomatic. One sees an argument as a healthy exchange of ideas; the other sees an argument as jeopardizing love and intimacy.

For example, has your fat friend or loved one ever said something like this to you?

- *I can't believe you just sat there and didn't stand up for me!*
Fatphobia hurts, but what hurts more is someone you love not coming to your aid when you're attacked.

Video of the Month



Three Ways to Stop Food Policing

Although most of us won't be able to gather with family and friends during the upcoming holidays, it's always good to be reminded of how we can set boundaries for those who feel it's their obligation to comment on our bodies or eating habits.

youtube.com/watch?v=T1H4gX2rwdI

Quick Links

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- *I can't believe you went after my mom like that. She's 80! She's always had a problem with my weight, and she always will.*
Sometimes we believe we're coming to the aid of a fat person but end up making a bad situation worse.
- *I can speak for myself just fine, you know. You don't have to jump in and rescue me anytime someone says the word diet.*
It's natural to want to defend someone you care about, but sometimes our defense becomes obtrusive and another way we rob them of their own voice.

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November Anti-Racism Resources - Indigenous People



While many of us traditionally celebrate Thanksgiving with friends and family, we need to be aware of the true meaning of the first Thanksgiving. Our current understanding of the holiday changes history, which celebrated attempts to eliminate the people that inhabited the land white Europeans invaded and stole.

HISTORY

[What Does Thanksgiving Mean to Native](#)

Americans?

There are always two sides of a story. Unfortunately, when it comes to the history of Thanksgiving, generations of Americans have been taught a one-sided history in homes and schools. The dominant cultural and historical story has been told from the perspective of the white colonialists who landed near Plymouth Rock in Massachusetts in 1620.

Did you know that November is Native American Heritage Month? Thanksgiving Day is a day of mourning for many Native Americans. Did you know that November 27th, known to most as Black Friday, is Native American Heritage Day?

VIDEOS

[Native American Girls Describe the REAL History Behind Thanksgiving](#) (Teen Vogue)
[Why These Native Americans Observe A National Day Of Mourning Each Thanksgiving](#)

NATIVE LAND MAP

If you don't know which Native American people lived on the land that you now inhabit, check out this map and Territory Acknowledgement Guide. Native Land Digital creates spaces where non-Indigenous people can be invited and challenged to learn more about the lands they inhabit, the history of those lands, and how to actively be part of a better future going forward together.

HONOR NATIVE LAND: A GUIDE AND CALL TO ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We're all on stolen land, whether we care to admit it or not. Land acknowledgments are a way for companies and individuals to identify wrongdoing, build new relationships with Native communities, and push for change in how we interact with the land going forward.

WHERE YOU CAN GO TO SUPPORT INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

[Crushing Colonialism](#)
[Indigenous Rising](#)
[Nalgonia Positivity Pride](#)
[NDN Collective](#)

The Oppression of a Weight-Cycling Culture

by *Darliene Howell*

Intentional weight loss (IWL) is [not sustainable](#). There's a reason DIE is in the word DIET. That's what your body believes is happening to you and it [will fight to keep you alive](#). It is also a physical manifestation of oppression and steeped in racism. You can learn the historical evidence for that statement from our [fall reading list](#) book for December: [Fearing the Black Body: the Racial Origins of Fat Phobia](#) by Dr. Sabrina Strings.



IWL is based on a "standard of beauty, a concept that you must meet a specific weight or body composition to fit in and to be acceptable. This standard of beauty is used to determine superiority. It is [unattainable for most people](#) and specifically oppressive to communities of color.

Diet culture establishes a hierarchy of worthiness and morality based on beliefs that focus values on weight, shape and size. This cultural bias leads to discrimination and marginalization. Combine that with other systems of marginalization (such as race, ethnicity, sexual and gender identities) and you can see how diet culture oppresses so many in our society.

I heard a friend recently call the diet industry the "weight cycling" industry. I love that because it is so very true. In any other industry, if you had a failure rate of 95%, you'd be closing the doors. But diet culture has lied to us and told us that they didn't fail, we did. Quite the marketing tool! Since no one I know likes to think of themselves as a failure, they keep trying and end up weight cycling.

THE CYCLE OF WEIGHT CYCLING

1. HATE YOUR BODY - "If I'd only lose X number of pounds my life would be great!"
2. RESTRICT/DEPRIVE/DENY - This means you count/weight/measure what you eat daily; REPEAT.
3. LOSE SOME WEIGHT - Yes, you will lose weight initially, until your biology kicks in.
4. PLATEAU - Your body recognizes that there isn't enough to maintain your current level of being and [slows things down](#). "Whoa! Time to

slam the brakes."

5. BLAME/SHAME - "It's my fault for not having enough will-power to MAKE my body give up the weight." You can't fight your biology. Your body believes it is in a time of famine and it will do whatever it needs to do to see that you survive.
6. REGAIN - Fight as you will, **IWL is not sustainable** for 95% of people. Your body will win. It will work to bring back those pounds as reserve for the next cycle of famine.

This is why it's referred to as weight cycling. DIET - LOSE - REGAIN - REPEAT

The weight cycling industry (yes, it's a **\$72 Billion dollar industry**) works to make us believe weight loss is sustainable, that diets are not temporary, that they are a LIFESTYLE. But when a lifestyle consists of focusing your entire being on what and how much you eat EVERY SINGLE DAY, where's the life? How are you making your life and the lives of those around you better?

IWL oppresses us by having us focus on unrealistic standards rather than our power. You've heard the phrase, "Throw your weight around." That phrase connotes power in physical size.

During the upcoming season of giving, give yourself a gift: give yourself a break from the oppression of meeting the standards of diet culture.

- Take back your power by loving yourself and your body.
- Focus on breaking the cycles that oppress us.
- Stop putting off things you want to do until you lose X amount of weight.
- Do what you love.
- Experience life outside the limits of intentional weight loss.
- Make LIVING your lifestyle and be a powerful force for change in our world.

The Importance of Intersectionality *by Tigress Osborn*

Over the last few years, we hope that you've noticed more and more from the NAAFA Board about taking an intersectional approach to our work as a fat rights organization. The term intersectionality was coined by law professor Kimberlé



Crenshaw over 30 years ago. She used it to talk about the ways systems of oppression intersect and overlap. While legal scholars were the main ones using the term for many years, it's gained in mainstream usage over the last decade. It has also been expanded to incorporate types of oppression not as widely discussed when it was originally used. Fat community has adopted the term to talk about how size discrimination impacts people differently based on how other kinds of discrimination do or do not impact us. We also use it to urge examination of the oft-spoken myth that anti-fatness

is the "last acceptable prejudice."

NAAFA is 51 years old. Over those five-plus decades, thousands of people have been members, and even more from all over the world have been touched by NAAFA's work in one way or another. But NAAFA has not always been an organization with an intersectional approach to fat politics. For many fat people, NAAFA has too often been seen as or experienced as a heteronormative, white organization that centers those experiences at the exclusion of others. While the message was always "we're here for all fat people," many of us who are People of Color or who identify as LGBTQIA+ have found that NAAFA centered straight people and white people, as has the entire movement in many ways. This happened sometimes simply because that's what American culture does, and no one interrupted that tendency. But sometimes this marginalization-within-a-marginalized community was the inevitable, if unintended, outcome of the attitudes of movement leadership.

NAAFA's leaders and membership were no exception. The combination of the idea that "we're all fat and that's all that matters" with a belief that talking about other social justice issues would somehow dilute or distract from NAAFA's messages led to a focus on fat at the exclusion of all other marginalizations and oppressions. That may have worked just fine for people who were experiencing weight stigma as the primary or sometimes only form of discrimination they were facing. For the rest of us, it has meant being asked to forget our other identities while in fat activist spaces.

At the 50th Anniversary Conference last year, NAAFA founder Bill Fabrey rose from the audience during one of the general sessions and told the 100 participants that he was one of the people over the years who'd insisted that NAAFA avoid talking about other social issues. We talked more about this recently during an episode of the NAAFA Webinar Series. Bill said, "[Back then] we said, 'We don't really know what the answer is, but we should deal with one oppression at a time, and stick with what we know best.'" He went on to say that he's changed his views. "It was 10 or 11 years ago, I think, that I did an about-face on this. I came to realize that oppression, no matter what it's cause, it all intersects. It's all intersectional. You can't fight one without fighting the others." ([Click here](#) to view that episode of the NAAFA Webinar Series. This topic is discussed at 48:33 mark.)

An intersectional view of fat activism is key to NAAFA's survival as an organization. We are going to keep talking about the importance of intersectionality. Many in fat community have been asking for this from NAAFA for a long time. We're going to increase our efforts to deliver it. We hope that you can look at our projects and programming for the last few years and see that we are striving to be intersectional versus just saying we are intersectional. Our new Board members all come from personal, professional, and political backgrounds that insist on intersectional values. They are already helping us build on our work towards living up to an intersectional standard. There is lots to do, and we're excited to do it.



The banner features a blue background with the text "#GIVING TUESDAY" in white, where the "V" in "GIVING" is replaced by a red heart icon. To the right, the word "naafa" is written in white lowercase letters. Below this, a white box contains the text "Save the Date! December 1, 2020" and "Go to <https://naafa.org/join donate> to give!"

NAAFA Chronicles 58

As part of our monthly NAAFA Chronicles feature, enjoy NAAFA's 58th newsletter, [Fall 1983](#).

For more, check out the "Chronicles" page of NAAFA's website, <https://naafa.org/chronicles>

Media and Research Roundup

by Bill and Terri Weitze

September 23, 2020: Dr. Akshay B. Jain discusses comments on his

commentary on obesity for *Medscape* and why they reflect notions about fatness that are overly simplistic or just plain wrong.

<https://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/937603>

October 17, 2020: A study presented at the International Bladder Cancer Network finds that fat people with non-muscle-invasive bladder cancer have improved response to a type of immunotherapy than non-fat patients.

<https://www.urotoday.com/conference-highlights/ibcn-2020/125274-ibcn-2020-correlation-between-bmi-diabetes-mellitus-and-outcomes-in-patients-treated-with-bcg-immunotherapy-for-non-muscle-invasive-bladder-cancer.html>

October 19, 2020: Fat Besties, a fat acceptance and body liberation group from Vancouver Island, sends an open letter regarding Canada's new Obesity Clinical Practice Guidelines, objecting to the exclusion of fat voices in the creation of the guidelines, as well as policies and practices that reinforce fatphobia in the healthcare industry.

<https://www.fatbesties.ca/blog/open-letter-re-obesity-canada>

October 20, 2020: A new study finds that people with higher BMI (overweight and obese) have better outcomes in acute coronary syndrome; over a BMI of 40 the benefit fell off, but those patients still did better than the underweight and "healthy" BMI ranges.

<https://www.cardiovascularbusiness.com/topics/acute-coronary-syndrome/obesity-paradox-acs-outcomes-underweight-patients>

<https://thisfatoldlady.com/2020/10/24/this-fat-old-ladys-fat-friday-fat-evolutionary-benefit-syndrome>

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amjcard.2020.09.059>

October 22, 2020: Ragen Chastain, writing for *The Mighty*, points out that you can't blame body size for health outcomes if access to healthcare for body sizes is unequal, and lists five ways weight stigma is harmful to fat people's health.

<https://themighty.com/2020/10/weight-stigma-hurts-health>

October 25, 2020: *Vol*Up*2* looks at four poems that are feminist and celebrate women's bodies, and the women who wrote those poems.

<https://www.volup2.com/articles-and-blog/2020/8/22/four-feminist-poems-that-celebrate-womens-bodies-written-and-translated-by-laurisa-sastoque>

October 25, 2020: Merissa Nathan Gerson provides a history of fat activism as part of Jewish culture as well as a glimpse into the newest generation of Jewish people who are working for fat liberation.

<https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/community/articles/fat-liberation-jewish-past-and-future>

October 27, 2020: Recent research (non-published/non-peer reviewed) presented at the American College of Gastroenterology 2020 Annual Scientific

Meeting finds that cannabis use may reduce steatohepatitis (a progression of fatty liver disease, a condition found in many fat people). This study is very preliminary.

<https://www.medscape.com/viewarticle/939813>

<https://thisfatoldlady.com/2020/11/07/this-fat-old-ladys-fat-friday-smoke-em-if-you-got-em>

November 9, 2020: *Scary Mommy* blogs about the need to lift up the voices of disabled people who are a part of the fat community.

<https://www.scarymommy.com/ableism-body-positivity-movement>

November 13, 2020: Aubrey Gordon (also known as Your Fat Friend) describes the battles between her body and the healthcare establishment and government as a fat child during the War on Obesity.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/13/opinion/childhood-obesity-health.html>

Founded in 1969, NAAFA, the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance, is a non-profit human rights organization dedicated to improving the quality of life for fat people. NAAFA works to eliminate discrimination based on body size and provide fat people with the tools for self-empowerment through public education, advocacy, and member support.

On the web: <https://naafa.org>

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