New Year, New Trial Me; A Brief Recap
By Women Unbounded
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Journey towards Self-Acceptance

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When did your body image issues start?
Lack of discussions around body neutrality or body positivity made it incredibly difficult to realize how and what I felt about my body as I was growing up. I had a different body experience and associated this difference with negativity. It got worse when I moved to Australia, where a lot of emphasis is put on athletics. Since I was not a sporty person, I started feeling negativity from a performance perspective.

What was the turning point and how did you overcome these issues?
I decided to take control of my body just before I entered the corporate world. I started to accept my body when I stopped resisting it and seeing it as the enemy. I worked on being mentally healthy and embracing my body, separating concepts of worth with weight and physicality. I focused on the great things I had accomplished. You need to get out of the toxic cycle of feeling bad about your body and then feeling bad about the negative feelings that come with it.

Advice to younger self:
Don’t let a moment define how you feel the rest of your life. Hating your body is hating like a big part of yourself forever. With each year you grow, you learn more about yourself and start to realize your self worth. It took me years to finally realize that it’s because of my body that I have been able to sustain myself and achieve this success. Your body is very much part of your success, your success is not in spite of it.
Tell us a little bit about Rock the Naked Truth & why you started it

When I was younger, I was driven by a strong desire to be skinny as I really believed that it would make me more popular. I went on this downward spiral, trying all types of diets and products and ultimately going through anorexia, bulimia and binge eating. When you get more attention from others, you tend to focus on your appearance, wanting to look a certain way to adhere to societal beauty standards. But truth is, who decides what these standards are?

Everyone is beautiful in their own way, it is just what we are exposed to via social media and magazines. I have spent years suffering from eating disorders, massively fluctuating body weight problems and overworking my body to the point of injury and did not get my period for 8 months. **Even after losing the weight, I was not happy.**

A friend then introduced me to a gym where I joined her for a PT session. Working out was not new to me, but I never found it enjoyable prior to this. This session made me realize that working out could be fun and empowering. This was when I shifted my mindset and **focused on what my body is capable of** & not what I want it to look like. I shared my story and realized that there were many other young people affected by these issues. It was from helping out at the hospital under the eating disorder unit and hearing the **mortality rate of girls who starve themselves** that I realising this is not a superficial problem. **That was when I decided, I wanted to do something,** and started the social movement, Rock the Naked Truth. The movement is meant as a reminder to people that **“You are enough & you dont have to do drastic things just to look a certain way.”**
When did your body image issues start?

It started with the “bright yellow weighing machine” back in primary school when I was declared morbidly obese by my PE teacher. I tried to laugh it off by saying that I had heavy bones but when I went home, I felt anger towards my parents for not ensuring that I had a healthy diet. That was when a battle started between me and my family, food, media.

Imagine the 8 year old version of yourself, telling you all the problems they are facing because of their appearance, don’t you agree that it is pretty messed up? These issues took so much of my time, life and mental state. All in all, I was too young when this started, before I was even properly exposed to the world.

It was wrong to put so much focus on different types of body shape and weight towards children at such a young age.

Speaking as someone who grew up morbidly obese, everyone has different experiences - people who are slim or skinny or even people who are really muscular, they face these body image issues as well.

Part of being labelled fat was that they would ask the kids to come early to school for “TAF club” and get them to run before assembly in a bid to help them lose weight. These children would then have to go the whole day reeking of sweat and got labelled as “smelly”. They feel that it is their fault they are not the “ideal weight” and the teachers would shame you in that sense and single you out.
What does it mean to be a fat activist?

I gravitated to fat activism much later in life. Like many, I too had body weight struggles, eating disorders which impacted my body, resulting in near-death experiences. When I turned 30, I decided to make changes by celebrating myself and started Curves Become Her, a fun plus size fashion blog, because fashion was not accessible to plus sized individuals. I found ways to make it accessible for myself and it was a journey of healing and fun. At that time, I was not comfortable with the word “fat” but as I worked on my body acceptance, I learned that things like body positivity and body neutrality were watered down versions of this movement called the “fat liberation movement”. I spoke to many fat acceptance activists and made a full transition about two years ago when I noticed that the body positivity movements were being taken over by bodies that were more acceptable; white, slim and many of the activists that were in it from the beginning did not feel that they belong in the body positivity movement anymore because we were fat. Fat activism to me is more than just tackling our body, it includes talking about issues like the food industry profiting off fat people’s insecurities. Weight stigma is a health issue. Fat activism also deals with issues of racism, desirability, homophobia, transphobia etc that have an impact on bodies. People use BMI and the “obesity epidemic” to shame fat people. They are often misdiagnosed, mistreated with bias, not gainfully employed because they are seen as lazy, harassed online and on the street. Fat activism is more than just improving self esteem and about the body, it is political.
Being a boxing instructor and a fitness enthusiast, have you ever struggled to embrace your body? & How has fitness helped you in that journey towards self-acceptance?

When I was younger, I was surrounded by people of different ethnicities and hence body types. When I hit puberty, I gained a lot of weight and struggled with self-acceptance. Sports has always been a crucial part of my life but despite finding success in sports, I was always more focused on how I looked, needing to look a certain way in order to gain acceptance.

Commercialism surrounding weight loss and fitness has also impacted my outlook on self-acceptance. It was not until a few years ago that I reached a point where fitness and self-acceptance made sense. The entire journey helped me reach self-acceptance.

People treat you differently based on your size. Security and insecurity is related to external factors, how we feel in their world and how the world reacts to us. Being with people on the same wavelength, who are not thinking about what you look like but focus on your abilities also helps build acceptance internally.

Stop caring about the negative comments and eventually they will stop affecting you.
Is it okay to use the word “fat”?

There is nothing wrong with it when you are using it to describe yourself, it is a descriptor but this is dependent on individual’s comfort level. Only use it to describe another person only if they are comfortable using it on themselves, but most importantly do not use it as an insult. As a society, we tend to add emotions to words. Words do not define a person’s worth, we are so much more than our physical descriptors. We need to take away the power out of the word “fat”, people who might be slightly bigger can feel comfortable and embrace it. It can be used to bring the community together rather than to shame them and put them in a corner. If people use it as an insult, best thing you can do is to turn back and say “Yes I am fat. So what?” Own it and take the emotion out of it; this takes away the ability of others to use the word to harm you.

Remembering Body Neutrality

- How to talk about body image issues when you are not fat, Dawy Rkausnam
- The bizarre and racist history of BMI, Your Fat Friend
- It’s time to retire “You’re not fat, you’re beautiful!”, Your Fat Friend
- “First, do no harm”: The importance of removing weight stigma from the pediatricians office, Oona Hanson
- How I made peace with my fat body and disappointed my parents, Sonalee Rashatwar
- The Fat Acceptance Movement: Answers to 5 important question
a) How do you draw the line between acceptance and health?
This is dependent on the individual but moderation is key. We don’t want you to be too restrictive in your eating habits where you can never have a social meal or junk food with friends and family once in a while. Nor do we want you to totally disregard having a balanced, healthy lifestyle. It is important to find a middle ground.

b) Eating junk food makes me feel good but it makes me gain weight; Should I accept myself for the way I am or should I try to change?
One should work towards being healthy. Make sure you are eating a wide range of foods to maintain a healthy diet, one that isn’t too restrictive or full of processed foods. Remember to exercise regularly as well. It’s about finding the balance and communicating with your body in a way that does not worsen any body image issues for those suffering from it. Learn to accept your body and work towards a healthier lifestyle.

c) What are some ways in which we can maintain a healthy mindset & avoid being overly critical about ourselves & our body?
Be more self-compassionate, keep mindful of what you’re feeling and give yourself some love.

d) How do you define a healthy relationship with food?
As this varies from person to person, we advise seeking help from your therapist. However, we generally encourage moderation. It is important to take foods from all food groups. Learn to listen to your body for your natural hunger and safety cues. Food is important as it serves as energy and fuel for the body and we should have a good relationship with it. Food should be enjoyable - a social time with friends and family. Try to adopt a flexible mindset around food and avoid being rigid in your diet. A sign of an unhealthy relationship with food is when food starts interfering with one’s ability to have a meal with their friends and family. Food should always be about balance and not avoidance.
Benefits of Journaling

● Improves physical health
● Improves mental health
● Improves immune functioning
● Improves memory as well

YOUR JOURNAL IS YOUR ALLY:

● It helps you become aware of any negative self talk regarding your body.
● When you read what you’ve written before, you can start intercepting the thoughts you had at that time. When you intercept your thoughts, you also have the power to change them.

How to make journaling a habit?

● Make it a tiny habit - Scale it way back!
  ○ Starting with a Paragraph/ Sentence/ even just a Word!
  ○ Whatever is easier each day
● See where you can fit journaling into your routine.
● Wire your brain by calling up a positive emotion. (Fist bump, clap, hum a happy song, jump, pat on your shoulder)
Journal Writing Exercise

a. Write wherever you feel like (notebook, laptop, phone, etc.) about your body.

b. Unpack an issue by letting your feelings connect the dots.

c. Don’t worry about your grammar or spelling.

d. You can start small (for 5 mins), writing on the same topic or choosing different topics everyday.

e. Questions to start with:
   1) When was the last time I was happy with my body? What was I doing then?
   2) Make a list of people you admire and love. Does their body have a big role to play in your opinion of them? Or their personality, skills, characteristics, strength, etc?
   3) For each insecurity, refute it and write a new thought that supports it.

f. As time passes, you can read through your old entries and track your progress and shift in attitude.

Resources for Journaling Beginners

- Lavendaire
- Rowena
About Women Unbounded

Women Unbounded (WU) is a volunteer-based community headquartered in Singapore, working for women’s empowerment through connections, mutual aid, ideas, and events. WU is proudly feminist; our approach to intersectional feminist activism is grounded in our beliefs in fairness, respect, and empiricism. One step at a time, we work to break down psychological, intellectual, socio-cultural, and economic barriers to gender equality.

WU’s Teams

Connections
Provide a safe space for mentorship and guidance

Mutual Aid
Empower women with knowledge and skills to excel

Ideas
Start conversations on what it means to be a woman and the norms that constrain us

Events
Host meaningful events to empower the individual and bond the community

Join Our Community!

Reach out to us at hello@womenunbounded.com

Resource Booklet: Special Mentions

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