

Episode 52: Revisiting Body Size
Released on September 17, 2021

[00:00:00.42] TORAL PATEL: The opinions expressed by the guests and contributors of this podcast are their own, and do not necessarily reflect the views of Cornell University or its employees. Welcome to the Inclusive Excellence Podcast. On today's show, we'll be revisiting one of our favorite episodes from season three. We'll share why we chose this episode and what has changed since we recorded the original episode. My name is Toral Patel.

[00:00:26.03] ANTHONY SIS: My name is Anthony Sis.

[00:00:27.68] TORAL PATEL: And you're listening to the Inclusive Excellence Podcast.

[00:00:30.31] [MUSIC PLAYING]

[00:00:44.51] All right. Hi, Anthony. How are you doing today?

[00:00:46.88] ANTHONY SIS: I am-- you know, I could be a little bit better. I still have this little congestion that's lingering in my voice. You may be able to hear it. So could be a little better. But we are here, and I can't be more excited to talk about this episode. How about you?

[00:01:03.08] TORAL PATEL: I am very, very excited to talk about this episode as well. Generally, I'm doing well. And we are here to revisit one of our favorite episodes from season three. This episode is called "Weighing in on Body Size," and it's part one. Our conversation was so great that we actually had-- this was one of the episodes where we had two parts. I'm going to start by talking about the first part with our guest Mia Ferraina. I'll tell you the reason why this was one of my favorite episodes, is because I think the topic that we discuss in terms of body size, it impacts me at a very, very personal level.

[00:01:41.94] I think I've shared that, yes, I'm a female-- a minority female. But for some reason, my race identity or my gender identity are not the two most forefront in my lived experience every day. The two identities that impact me the most are the two identities that we talked about in this episode, which is my weight and my height. I think it was one of my favorites because it's probably the most vulnerable I've ever been-- not that that's the reason why it's my favorite, but like I said, it's two topics that just really impact me.

[00:02:14.27] It's two things that I think about every single day. And I think, if we listen to the episode, it took me quite a long time, even within the discussion, to get comfortable sharing about my weight and my height. I think in the episodes-- that's an edited version of the episode. It took me about 13 minutes. Even then, as I was going through the episode, it takes a while for me to talk about these two identities. It's why it's one of my-- it's the one that I wanted to revisit the most.

[00:02:43.19] ANTHONY SIS: Yeah, I agree. I remember even editing that episode too and thinking, wow, Toral shared a lot about herself. It's one of those things, when you're

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recording it in the studio, that you don't really think too much about-- or if you're recording it remote, in this case, you don't really think too much about it. You're just talking, and you're just talking. But then when I went to revisit it, I was like, wow, Toral did actually share a lot about herself. And I think I even messaged you at one point while I was editing it to say, Toral, I don't think you realize how much you shared, and are you OK with this? Are you comfortable with this being put in the final episode? And you said yeah.

[00:03:18.68] I thought that was amazing. And it's definitely a topic that, for me too-- I shared a little bit about my personal experience of this topic as well. But body size is still kind of taboo to talk about in a workplace context. And I think this episode really helped, I think, merge the importance of talking about body size when we talk about accessibility and access to physical spaces and physical resources with the DE&I lens. That's why I really appreciate this, and just the tone that-- and the standard, really, the bar that Mia set in terms of her own vulnerability, too, with this topic as well. So shout-out to Mia. We're sending you lots of love as well.

[00:03:57.29] TORAL PATEL: Yeah. Thank you, Mia, for your vulnerability and for your willingness to talk about this. Because had you actually not volunteered, I don't think I would have ever shared the amount that I did. I definitely want to thank you as well. Anthony, what was your biggest takeaway from the episode?

[00:04:14.00] ANTHONY SIS: One of my big takeaways, I remember, was learning about a new term that I myself had to look up, which is called infinifat. Infinifat is spelled I-N-F-I-N-I-F-A-T. And, Toral, do you know what infinifat means?

[00:04:32.99] TORAL PATEL: Yes. It's a description used for those whose size is greater than any assignable size number. Essentially, in quotations, what I'm reading online says it's "when an individual is considered to be too fat for commercially available clothing." And so they are sized out of brick-and-mortar plus sized stores and must order their clothing online.

[00:04:54.98] ANTHONY SIS: Yeah. And I thought that was super profound. I know Mia shared that term. And I remember having to be like, I need to look that up. In terms of practice, I think it's one of those things that, as we continue to evolve in our language and our understanding of different identities and communities, it's OK to take the time to do some research, like I did on this particular episode with this term. That was a really big takeaway for me, and something that I just appreciated learning more about. I'm always in a constant state of learning.

[00:05:22.67] TORAL PATEL: Yeah. And for me, I think, after the episode, I did a little bit-- obviously, my own research as well. I revisited the Harvard implicit bias testing program. And I actually attended a training. And the trainer there mentioned that, in terms of all of the other biases that they measure in the various tests that they have-- there's gender, and religion, and all kinds of other diversity topics that they measure-- the one for weight is the one that stands out to me. In terms of all of the other identities,

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biases are going down in what people experience on a regular basis, with the exception of weight. Biases towards individuals that are heavier, they're continuing to go up. That's something that we all need to think about as well, that this is impacting every single person on a daily basis.

[00:06:12.04] ANTHONY SIS: Yeah. We did talk about that, too-- the biases that overweight people, that bigger people, experience. And even those who claim the identity of being fat, as well. Part of it, too, is one of those things that I feel, in this episode, just reaffirming that-- even the term *infinifat*. Some people claim fat as a positive identity, not as a negative one. And that's very much on an individual level, on an individual basis, of whether or not people view themselves that way. Yeah, I think this episode is definitely worth revisiting because of how taboo I feel-- even in the midst of a pandemic and working remote, for many of us, how taboo it still is to really talk about this in the DE&I space.

[00:06:57.10] TORAL PATEL: And we've talked about weight here. But in terms of body size, there are so many other components that go into it. And I know that, with Mia, we also talked quite a bit about height. I think Mia and I both identified as shorter in height. That's something that really impacts us as well. And we also talked about how those individuals that are shorter-- or even taller-- might be impacted in the workplace. We talked that-- whether you're on the taller side or on the shorter side, an average-sized desk, in terms of height, is probably not going to work for you. I think we both identified that, in terms of body size, it's so much more than just weight.

[00:07:35.68] ANTHONY SIS: And that's another key learning that I took away from this episode, I'll be honest. Because I do have a sister who also, similarly, is shorter. And I don't really think about that intersection of gender, height, weight all the time because of my own identities, right? Yeah, that was a really big takeaway for me as well, just knowing that, yeah, that there is a large conversation to be had about that intersection that is not currently being had.

[00:08:01.60] TORAL PATEL: Yeah. And on that note, let's get right to the episode.

[00:08:11.44] ANTHONY SIS: Mia, thank you so much for being with us today. Why don't you start by sharing with our listeners a little bit more about yourself in terms of what you do here at Cornell, where did you grow up, as well as the pronouns that you use?

[00:08:23.98] MIA FERRAINA: My name is Mia. I work as a career coach down in Career Services next to the campus store. So I see students in all of the different colleges, which is really cool. I grew up in different suburbs around Buffalo. I've been in New York state most of my life, other than grad school. And I use she/her pronouns. And I guess maybe, just for relevance of today's podcast topic, I think it helps, since you can't see us or who we are, to just kind of say a little bit about who I am or what I look like, in relevance to the topics today. I'm only 5 foot tall, so that's definitely shorter than

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average for women. And I'm just about 200 pounds, so not what some people might call infinifat, or big fat or medium fat, but plus size in some sense.

[00:09:10.15] ANTHONY SIS: Great. Well, thank you for sharing all of those things. And we'll definitely disclose, as well, a little bit about ourselves so that the audience knows how we look like in terms of our size. As usual, we have our question of the day. And Mia, I know you're very excited--

[00:09:22.76] MIA FERRAINA: I am.

[00:09:23.47] ANTHONY SIS: Because you've listened to a few episodes now.

[00:09:25.03] MIA FERRAINA: I have.

[00:09:25.53] ANTHONY SIS: So you're excited for this question.

[00:09:27.00] MIA FERRAINA: Here from day one.

[00:09:28.15] ANTHONY SIS: Day one. I love it. Love all the supporters that come on this show. So I do have a question. Are you ready?

[00:09:34.04] MIA FERRAINA: Ready.

[00:09:34.54] ANTHONY SIS: I think this is a good one. I heard this on another podcast, and I was like, I want to ask this question for us to answer. Should the workplace feel like a family, a sports team, a classroom, or something else?

[00:09:49.66] MIA FERRAINA: That's an awesome question, Anthony.

[00:09:51.04] ANTHONY SIS: I know. I heard it, and I was like, you know what? I would love to answer that here on the podcast.

[00:09:55.75] TORAL PATEL: Mia, we're going to let you answer first.

[00:09:57.40] MIA FERRAINA: Oh, OK. I'm honored.

[00:09:58.60] ANTHONY SIS: Put you on the spot, since you loved it.

[00:10:00.70] MIA FERRAINA: I would say I would like it to feel like a sports team. Maybe that's because I had a positive experience with sports generally. Because sports teams still get along most of the time. It's about collaborating for the greater good, which I think a staff, or a team-- an office team should feel. Whereas, I feel like families have a lot more variation of drama, or people that get kind of outcast, or things like that. I don't know. In my mind, it's working towards a common goal, harmony most of the time, still a little bubbling of drama here and there. But mostly, we're all working towards the same thing, and everyone's included.

[00:10:47.32] ANTHONY SIS: Do you want to go, Toral?

[00:10:48.22] TORAL PATEL: Yeah, no, I think I would agree with that, definitely. That I like that there is an end goal that you're working towards as a group. It's very similar to a sports team. And then there are a couple of people within that dynamic that you're closer to than others, which is very natural, similar to a sports team. I would agree with you, Mia, that I believe that definitely is like a sports team. It's so funny, because until you said something, I've always thought family. I think when-- as soon as Anthony popped the question, my first thought was, oh, it needs to be like family. And then you explained your reasoning, and I was like, wait, no, that's exactly how I feel. But maybe I've just called it a family, and I really meant sports team.

[00:11:24.78] ANTHONY SIS: I think it's a challenging question for me to answer in that I don't know if there's like a general kind of way to answer for all workplace environments. For example, I've worked in an identity-based center with an identity that's very close to my own, because I used to work at a LGBTQ Resource Center. I think the workplace culture in that kind of environment was much more familial, because there was a personal investment in the work that I was doing, but also how I related to my own personal life, even outside of work. I think, in that context, it was hard, sometimes, to view it as a sports team when there was just so much personal and professional investment in that work.

[00:12:00.52] I think, in this role, though, I definitely see more of a sports team kind of dynamic. For me, it's all about the dynamic, but also where you work. Sometimes, I think, if you're working in an environment where your identity is also at play, directly or indirectly, I think there's more-- I don't know. I think it's a little bit more challenging to just generalize and say, every workplace should be like this, because it's depending on the work that you do in the workplace-- and the organizational piece to it, too. Is it a nonprofit? Is it a corporate? I think all of those key things definitely play a role. It can look different in those areas, depending on your role and what type of organization you work in.

[00:12:38.08] MIA FERRAINA: Yeah. That makes sense.

[00:12:40.34] ANTHONY SIS: To start this conversation, I wanted to give a little bit more detail than what we had already discussed about where this topic is going, why we're focusing on it. Mia and I actually met through a body positivity group here that's facilitated through Cornell Health last September, October, or-- Roughly around when it started. It was a weekly lunch engagement, and we got to talk about different things related to body size specifically, and weight, and things like that-- how it's impacted us personally and professionally.

[00:13:09.95] It was just something that I just figured, as a way to continue the conversation outside of that particular group, what better way to discuss it than through the podcast? And especially, I love the piece about focusing on body size in terms of height and weight. For me, in the spirit of vulnerability that Mia has already shared, I'm

about 5' 9", 5' 13, and I weigh about 190 pounds. Technically, it's considered overweight-- technically. But depending on who--

[00:13:35.48] MIA FERRAINA: Seriously? Wow.

[00:13:35.98] ANTHONY SIS: Yeah, no, technically.

[00:13:37.18] MIA FERRAINA: That's surprising to me.

[00:13:37.91] ANTHONY SIS: Technically, it's overweight. But I think the assumption that people have when they see me-- depending on who you ask. And I think culture definitely plays a role in this. Sometimes people will be like, oh, you've gotten a little bigger, you've gotten a little chunky, or whatever. And then some people are just like, oh, no, you look fine. For me, I think my experience with this topic is very much, I'm in the gray area where, sometimes-- especially, in terms of height, I think, for me, it's a privilege that I recognize I have to be kind of, quote, unquote, "average height" or "normal height," whatever that means.

[00:14:06.05] Because everyone else in my family is shorter. So I'm the tallest. But in terms of weight, it's something that I've definitely always struggled with, even things like body size. And we-- Mia and I, we talked a lot about that in the body positivity group-- is that it's just been a challenge. I'm not there-- I'm not the perfect norm, whatever that is. But I'm also not on the far end of anything. I'm just kind of in this spectrum area, so to speak. I guess to start the conversation, Mia, what was kind of the interest in you to want to continue this conversation through this podcast?

[00:14:37.46] MIA FERRAINA: Yeah. I mean, like I said, I've listened to it for a while. But I also think that group was helpful for me, just to kind of have that unity around body size and body positivity in general. I think, walking into that room the first day, I was surprised to see the range of people that were in the room. I think I was expecting to walk in and see a lot of people who were plus size or somewhere on the fat spectrum. And there was people of all shapes and sizes in that room. I remember being like, wow, OK, maybe this kind of sucks that everybody in this room is here because they hate their body, but at least there's some unifying-- I don't know.

[00:15:18.02] It felt very reassuring to know that other people struggled with this, even though it was a negative common experience. I think it's something important to talk about, not only-- that group was really focused on our personal lives, I think. And it's certainly-- being shorter and heavier affects me in my personal life in a lot of ways. But I think even just since I started at Cornell this past summer, I've noticed some things on campus where I'm like, hm, I wish this was different. Or, oh, this is definitely here from a much further time past, where maybe more people were, quote, unquote, "standard" size. Yeah, I've noticed some things even just in the-- what? Eight months I've been here.

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[00:15:58.76] ANTHONY SIS: And if you don't mind me asking, as a follow-up, what are some of those things that you have noticed that really bring up this question around accessibility, particularly for different sizes?

[00:16:08.45] MIA FERRAINA: Yeah. And I think accessibility is the key word there. Because I think sometimes people view fat folks as complaining-- of, you did this to yourself, or you're big because of-- it's a very blame-oriented thing, sometimes, when really, oftentimes, it's a matter of access. And I wouldn't compare it to someone in a wheelchair. I mean, they're different experiences. But it's like, can I physically fit into and/or sit at or be comfortable in that space? So I do like the fact that you used the word "access" there.

[00:16:45.29] I would say, at Cornell, a couple of different things that I've noticed-- one, especially, because I work near Cafe Jennie in the campus store. I'm sure there are other chairs on campus that are like this. But I actually hate meeting in that cafe even though it's super close to my office, because the chairs are really narrow and they have these very harsh arms on them that dig into the side of my legs and basically cut off my thighs and my hips-- it just oozes out the side, and it's super uncomfortable to the point where sometimes I have trouble focusing on the conversation I'm having. Even when people are like, oh, it's just a chair. But if you're sitting in that chair for an hour.

[00:17:29.36] I think something else I think about is Willard Straight. That traffic flow going in and out of Willard Straight, A, it's not a really inaccessible entrance in general, because of the stairs. But the doors are so narrow. There's so many people going in and out there that I feel like I have trouble getting in and out of that building without bumping into people or having to wait for someone to come in or out.

[00:17:55.01] And I can't imagine being someone larger than I am and feeling that way about not only those doors, but many other hallways and doorways around campus. That's something I've been thinking about at this older campus, with some more traditional, old-school wooden doors. I would say those are probably the two big ones that I've noticed here at Cornell. I've had some other work-related experiences, but definitely the chairs have been an issue for me. And I haven't been in as many classrooms here at Cornell, but those desks that have the chair and the desk attached to them--

[00:18:31.16] ANTHONY SIS: The fold. Yeah.

[00:18:31.43] MIA FERRAINA: Yeah. Either that fold, or you literally just have to squeeze yourself into the space. Again, I know I have trouble with those because my feet don't touch the floor. I have trouble with those because I have to squeeze myself into it. And sometimes, for me, that desk is hitting me at my widest part rather than at my waist because of my height. it's kind of difficult there, too. But I also know tall people who really struggle in those chair-desk attached things. Or, obviously, people who are bigger than I am would also struggle with that.

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[00:19:03.38] TORAL PATEL: In full disclosure, I am a little bit shorter than you at 4' 11". It's something I admit to often. I always say five feet. Again, this goes--

[00:19:12.41] MIA FERRAINA: My license says 5' 1", which is also a lie, so.

[00:19:14.66] TORAL PATEL: Yeah. It just goes back to the history of things and how it impacts you. My weight is, right now, around 161, 162. But again, being short, that is considered to be obese. One of the things that I had to have done for me, at work, the same thing-- because my feet always hang-- is I had to get one of those desks that go up and down, but not one that just sits on top of the desk, because then I'm constantly looking up. And when you're short, that's actually not the right way to do it. I had to get one where the entire desk goes up and down. It's the only way. And it actually sits about 2 inches below everybody else's desk. It's the only way my feet don't dangle and they're not swollen at the end of the day.

[00:19:53.99] MIA FERRAINA: Yeah. I got one of those little footstool things recently. I just found it in somebody else's closet in their office. I used to just-- this is so weird. I used to just put a box lid-- a paper box lid under my desk, because it was just that little bit enough that raised my feet up so they weren't dangling. Or sometimes, I would make it so that I would slouch so that my feet wouldn't dangle, but that's not good either.

[00:20:20.03] ANTHONY SIS: Yeah, that's not good for your back, when you're sitting for eight hours-- yeah.

[00:20:22.31] MIA FERRAINA: Posture.

[00:20:22.80] TORAL PATEL: I have turned my garbage over. Actually, it used to be the recycle bin. I used my trash can, but not my recycle bin, and I just put my feet on it.

[00:20:32.63] ANTHONY SIS: Wow.

[00:20:33.59] TORAL PATEL: Mia, have you ever been judged solely based on your body size and not your knowledge, skills, or abilities?

[00:20:39.83] MIA FERRAINA: I guess it's hard to say solely, because you don't necessarily ask that, or have a way to prove that that's the core of the issue. But I think being a shorter person-- and you might have experienced this too, Toral-- is people confusing you for a student, people assuming that you're younger than you are, or just treating you like you don't know as much. I think it can be really discouraging to have someone talk to you in a condescending way. And you're going through this mental Rolodex of why.

[00:21:10.07] Why are they talking to me like I don't know what I'm doing? Is it because I'm new? Is it because I'm young? Is it because they think I'm younger than I am? It really detracts from, A, the conversation, but also that relationship, to be wondering why they're treating you that way. For me, that's probably more tied to my height than my

weight. I think the weight piece is more at office events that have food involved or something like that. Those are a little more uncomfortable, I think.

[00:21:40.13] ANTHONY SIS: And having to navigate that, right? How do you-- that's so interesting you mention that, because I've never really thought about it in that context, but I'm always-- I am very self-conscious of what I eat in public because I don't like the feeling of being bloated, especially if I'm in a work meeting, or even if it's an informal meeting with colleagues after work. I get very self-conscious about eating food or feeling bloated, because then I become self-conscious about my image-- my body image and the perception. And if I get a little stomach that comes out, I-- it's so interesting that you mention that, because I never thought about it in this context around this conversation. But yeah, it's definitely, for me, just something that's hardwired that I haven't really sat down and processed. Like, why?

[00:22:21.63] MIA FERRAINA: A lot of internalized body-shame and--

[00:22:24.14] ANTHONY SIS: Yeah.

[00:22:24.89] MIA FERRAINA: Yeah. I mean, we all have it, right? I think even people who are, like, fat icons, or promote fat positivity, they still will acknowledge those moments of, oh, man, I did this thing today and I didn't even realize that that's where it was stemming from. For me, things like that are, oh, I'm trying to be good today, or oh, today's my cheat day, or I've been working out, so I'm going to let myself have this. That whole idea of bartering exercise and food, and what's good food or bad food, those things, I think, can be really uncomfortable in these work settings where you're eating with other people.

[00:23:04.05] TORAL PATEL: And do you feel the need to justify it to the other individuals and say, oh, I worked out, like, three hours yesterday, so I'm going to have a cupcake today. Other people can just pick up a cupcake and eat it, but you feel this need to let them know why it's OK for you to eat that cupcake.

[00:23:18.84] MIA FERRAINA: I think sometimes I do and sometimes I don't. Again, I think it's hard, because it's so much part of our culture to kind of talk about your goals or what you're working towards. I would never want to squash someone else being proud that they've been working out, or keeping up a healthy routine or something. But it is hard to hear other people say that and then feel like you can just exist and not have to explain yourself.

[00:23:46.74] I wouldn't say that I am of the size where I constantly feel the need to explain what I'm eating. I think I'm kind of in that borderline place where people aren't judging me as much as someone who's maybe what they would call "superfat." So I don't feel that need to justify. But when someone else does something, then I feel like I also have to justify what I'm doing. It's hard. I want to be supportive, but also, I don't want to have to justify myself.

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[00:24:14.88] ANTHONY SIS: In talking about body size, and especially how it affects people here at work-- I mean, we started, already, talking a little bit about it. But Mia, do you any examples that you feel comfortable sharing that really stand out as either really negative or just problematic experiences around perceptions of your body size?

[00:24:34.77] MIA FERRAINA: I mean, personally, one that really stands out for me-- and this is literally sixth grade. This is years and years and years ago, but it's still something-- that quote, verbatim, sticks with me. Lots of examples. But this one in particular was this boy that I had a crush on. He was a baseball player, kind of that traditional slim, tall physique. And I wanted him to be my boyfriend, whatever that means in sixth grade. But I distinctly remember standing in the hallway at the Boys & Girls Club after school and him looking at me and saying, I can't date you. The boy is supposed to weigh more than the girl. Point-blank--

[00:25:15.81] ANTHONY SIS: Wow.

[00:25:16.14] MIA FERRAINA: --sixth grade, said that flat-out. And I will never, ever forget that. And I think it's impacted who I view myself as-- I don't know if capable is the right word. But like, who I'm able to date. Able sounds really weird. But who-- that, like, rating scale that people use sometimes.

[00:25:35.27] [INTERPOSING VOICES]

[00:25:35.67] ANTHONY SIS: Like, who you should desire or who you should see as a potential partner?

[00:25:39.04] MIA FERRAINA: Yeah. Right. Are you pretty enough or desirable enough to be with that person? And it's definitely impacted the way I view myself, and honestly, even the people that I think I pursued after that, once I was actually dating. I tended to go for people who were larger than me, or taller than me, or much more masculine-presenting, because I was playing a rather masculine sport at the time and presenting a little bit more androgynous. And yeah, I think that really impacted the way I viewed myself and potential partners.

[00:26:18.39] ANTHONY SIS: For folks who don't know what androgyny is or means, it's folks who present both masculine and feminine characteristics in terms of their gender expression.

[00:26:27.00] MIA FERRAINA: I think that one really stood out to me as something that I just never forget. But I think there are other kind of relationship things now-- I'm in a long-term, committed relationship now, so that's not really something I think about as much. But when I think about dating profiles, or even friendship profiles if you use things like that.

[00:26:49.78] ANTHONY SIS: Oh, goodness, yes.

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[00:26:50.94] MIA FERRAINA: They're so visually oriented. I think we talked about this maybe before, Anthony, but the idea of, where is the line between thick and fat? "Thick" being this kind of desirable term-- and who gets to label you thick? Is that something you call yourself or something that other people call you? And even the idea of catfishing. Like, oh, you have a pretty face, but you're actually fat. That whole dynamic is really, really strange.

[00:27:21.21] ANTHONY SIS: Yeah, like you said, where is the boundary for somebody who's thick and somebody who's fat? Even the term thick, as positive as it may be, there are still limitations to it related to body size. And I think there is this whole kind of movement now, even from when I was younger, societally speaking, of bigger people now being more desirable. And to now, where are people who are not as big or not as "thick," quote, unquote.

[00:27:46.29] What does that even mean, A? But then also, who are not as thick, where are they now along this kind of spectrum of desirability? Which is strange in many ways. And I think the whole thing with dating profiles, it's just so-- Tinder is, I guess, the first one to sort of use the swipe--

[00:28:00.51] MIA FERRAINA: The swipes.

[00:28:00.78] ANTHONY SIS: --right, swipe left, or whatever. I thought that was just so weird. It's just like, you're literally just looking at somebody, looking at their stats--

[00:28:07.55] MIA FERRAINA: And you're judging them.

[00:28:07.95] ANTHONY SIS: Yeah. Looking at their stats. Looking at their age, their weight, height, and using that as a determinant for whether or not you're going to swipe left or what. For me, the concept of it is just so weird, you know? I don't even know the person, but yet here I am judging them based off of these hardcore statistics and numbers. And I know nothing about their personality. What happens if their personality just blows me out of the park and I'm like, wow, they're amazing-- and regardless of that. But you need to know that information in order to meet them or have a conversation with them. It's so weird.

[00:28:38.10] MIA FERRAINA: Yeah. I don't know if either of you have used Bumble BFF, but there's a friendship part of bumble that I also think is really strange, because it still is very picture-focused and picture-oriented. And I'm like, for me, I don't care what my friends look like. I just want to jive with them. It doesn't matter to me. It really surprised me how similar the friendship part of that app is, too, to the dating part of it. That's very interesting.

[00:29:06.43] ANTHONY SIS: It's so strange.

[00:29:07.59] TORAL PATEL: I want to go back to your example that you just shared earlier, of being in sixth grade and having somebody make that kind of a comment.

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Because I'm sure we all have-- and I distinctly remember my comment to this day. How do you overcome something like that and really accept who you are as an individual? Because to go through that in sixth grade, that impacts how you view yourself for not only the rest of your school days, but also, I think, as an adult too. How have you kind of overcome that, to be here today where you are willing and open to talking about body size?

[00:29:43.08] MIA FERRAINA: Yeah. Well, I will say, I haven't totally gotten over it anyways. I'm more comfortable talking about body size for a few different reasons, some of those being solidarity. Definitely, it helps finding other people who are struggling with similar challenges. I think social media, in a weird way, is both good and bad for issues like this. Seeing people out there who are unapologetically fat, and reclaiming that word, seeing people who are different and lots of different ways related to their body, whether it's disability-related, or body size, or anything, I think, can be empowering for others to see.

[00:30:24.15] While, at the same time, there's also a lot of, quote, unquote, "picture-perfect" bodies on social media that make you feel bad about yourself. I wouldn't say that there's anything that really helped me overcome that. I think it's something I'm still struggling with. But it seems more, maybe, socially acceptable to talk about now. And honestly, living and working in Ithaca and at a college/university setting, I think a lot more topics are on the table than in other settings too. I think that's part of why I'm comfortable talking about it for myself, and also, maybe feel a little bit obligated to talk about it for the sake of students who might not be comfortable speaking about it from their own perspective.

[00:31:07.75] ANTHONY SIS: Yeah, definitely. We're talking about body size, and there's so many-- there's the weight and the height aspect that we were talking about. But I think there's also just the general acknowledgment, we're speaking about our own experiences, but that this also affects people who are thinner, or might be really, really tall, as you had mentioned, Mia. There's a lot of articles that have been written about bias and the role of bias in terms of weight, especially, and how people perceive people who are bigger to be lazier and less likely to get promotions and stuff. From your own experience, from your experience in the workforce as a whole, have you ever encountered any type of bias based off of assumptions around your body size?

[00:31:49.93] MIA FERRAINA: I don't know that I face bias in terms of not getting a promotion or something like that. But definitely, the ability to fully engage in an experience, I think, has been impacted for me and students that I've worked with. Just as an example, you've probably heard some kind of team bonding ropes course type things that happen in different settings. And obviously, there's a lot of issues with that in terms of just ability in general. But body size, as well. You're talking about, pick this person up and put them over here, or balance out the weight of your team on this teeter-totter, or try to rearrange yourselves while standing on this really narrow pole.

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[00:32:33.16] A lot of those activities, regardless of whether you are, quote, unquote, "able-bodied," if you're big, it's hard to do some of those things, and can be really uncomfortable for that student, as well as their team. It's like, do you acknowledge this-- no pun intended-- elephant in the room that this student physically is not able to complete this activity, or the discomfort around that? I mean, aside from just uniforms, and giveaway sizes, and just polos, and that kind of stuff. I think, while that is certainly an issue, I think the bigger thing for me is, this is meant to be a unifying event, and sometimes, it is the least unifying thing for some people or some teams.

[00:33:17.26] ANTHONY SIS: And some people might enjoy it too, right? I think there's also that assumption that maybe it is going to serve a huge barrier, but some people who are bigger might also be like, yeah, sign me up. I think there's that understanding of, I think, just really getting to know your teams and who you're working with as you're putting events like team-building activities together, and to just get as much input as possible and to really understand your team as a whole and not make any assumptions of, well, they may not enjoy this. And it's like, well, have you asked them? Have you gauged the question with them? Or a conversation of the planning of that particular experience.

[00:33:48.64] I think about, recently, I went to Mexico. And I went on this ziplining experience where there were people of varying different body sizes. And for some of the bigger folks, they had an additional harness, but in no way was it-- they weren't ever treated like a barrier. We weren't like, oh, they've got to add another harness, so therefore it's going to extend it. No, it was just kind of like, OK, cool, we'll just add another harness and call it a day. That's just, like, a standard protocol. I think just in terms of streamlining processes, of just getting as much input as possible on your team, and really getting to know them without the assumption that people may not be able to do so, or we would feel uncomfortable doing so.

[00:34:25.72] MIA FERRAINA: Right. Or if it's a large group, where you can't possibly ask everyone, and you don't know them. If you're training a huge staff of RAs or something, you're not going to know--

[00:34:35.17] ANTHONY SIS: That's true.

[00:34:35.47] MIA FERRAINA: --before you plan something like that.

[00:34:36.97] TORAL PATEL: But it's also-- there's also something about how you ask them. To approach you and say, you know what? The rest of the team wants to do this. How do you feel? That's not the right way to do it. It's about-- the how is also just as important as actually asking the question, to me.

[00:34:52.27] MIA FERRAINA: Definitely.

[00:34:53.14] TORAL PATEL: Because you've already told them what you want to hear.

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[00:34:55.06] MIA FERRAINA: Yes. No, it needs to be, like, a survey in advance, or a question in advance, not, like, we're planning this thing and you're an afterthought. It needs to be, we are trying to proactively seek input before we make a plan. And there needs to be a good alternative. It can't just be, oh, I guess we won't do that. Because then everyone resents that person.

[00:35:17.62] ANTHONY SIS: Yeah. And I think, even in planning the alternatives, it's just a good practice to do, to plan beforehand and not during or after the fact. Because then, at that point, they're seen as an afterthought. They're seen as this-- and then it becomes this whole issue of feeling like a nuisance to the entire team. It's trying to be as productive as possible for when those things happen, even if they don't. That way, the whole team doesn't feel this disconnect in any way. And like you said, it's just kind of like, OK, we'll just accommodate, or we'll do XYZ thing for this group or this person. And no constraint to the actual team dynamic or session itself.

[00:35:56.73] TORAL PATEL: Thank you for listening. Be sure to subscribe to us wherever you listen to podcasts, and rate and submit a review on Apple Podcasts. It helps new listeners find us and the show. For the latest updates on diversity, equity, and inclusion at Cornell, be sure to visit diversity.cornell.edu. My name is Toral Patel.

[00:36:16.16] ANTHONY SIS: My name is Anthony Sis. Thank you for listening to another episode of the Inclusive Excellence Podcast.

[00:36:22.58] TORAL PATEL: This podcast is a production of the Department of Inclusion and Belonging, in collaboration with the Cornell Broadcast Studio.

[00:36:29.72] [MUSIC PLAYING]