

Dear Skinny Me

Dear Skinny Me,

I haven't seen you in ages! I know it probably feels like I've forgotten you.

The thing is, I don't think I'll be seeing you again. I can't even say, 'it's not you, it's me,' because that's not true. It is you. I can't give you all the blame, of course, but you're not a better person than me. In fact, there are many things I prefer about myself now that I'm not you.

Diet culture is everywhere, and when I was you, I bought into it completely. Lose weight and be happy. Drop a dress size and all your dreams will come true. When you disappeared, I didn't know any alternative. It was a binary choice; be skinny or be miserable. And so, my entire existence was obsessed with the number on the scales every week. If that number stayed the same, or worse, went up, then I was a failure, incapable of even following a simple diet.

Sure, it was great when the number went down. Do you remember the compliments? You took up less physical space, and that was something to be proud of.

But then you turned into me. The compliments stopped. Everyone had witnessed my failure. But they said nothing. At the time, there was no such thing as 'it's okay not to be okay.' I was just treated as 'not okay.'

What the diet companies don't mention when they're telling us to 'Be a Better You!' is they make money from this misery. When their diet works, we think, 'Thank you, Weight Watchers/Slimming World/Jenny Craig.' But when it stops working, we only blame one person. Ourselves. We don't realise that diets are designed to fail, because if we were all happy, skinny people, then where would these companies make their money?

The thing is, Skinny Me, despite knowing this, it's difficult to believe in. For all the companies being applauded for their inclusive campaigns, they still fall short. Whether it is

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Dove, with their flawless skin, or Boots showing average-sized women wearing a bikini, I still can't identify with the models shown. They are not me. Their goal is to feel beautiful. I can't do that, and I don't want to waste time trying. I'd rather be smart, or creative, or kind. Beauty doesn't seem worth it.

It's why I can't follow the Body Positivity movement. Love yourself, no matter what you look like. There are many things I love, but when I look back at the end of my life, I want to be more than my body, no matter what size it ends up. After years of being told my worth is diminished in opposition to my size, I cannot find the energy to feel love for it.

Body acceptance is more realistic and more appealing, but even that is difficult. I don't need to tell you that we are bombarded with images of what we should look like, and it's not the ones who take up a lot of space. Do you remember reading that article about what cellulite actually is? When I went on Google to find out more, the first article to come up was 'Is There Anything Worse than Cellulite?' Our bodies are so hated this thing that 90% of women have now joined the ranks of Hitler. When the apocalypse comes, we'll be greeted by the Four Horsemen; War, Famine, Death and Cellulite.

Skinny Me, I've come to realise it's not just physical space I don't want to take up. When I read my writing aloud, I usually speak fast so as to not bore anyone listening. Recently, someone asked if I was nervous reading out. Honestly, no, not anymore. But I can't seem to take up my allotted time. It means my work isn't getting the space it deserves, but I can't make myself slow down.

Knowledge is power, right? I know that women apologise more than men, that women are more likely to be interrupted than men, that it's only girls who are called bossy. So you'd

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think I would stop apologising, stop letting people interrupt me and eradicate the word 'bossy' from my vocabulary. Well, one out of three ain't bad.

I don't take up space online, either. If you scrolled through my social media, you'd see that I 'like' a lot of things. The only photos of me are when I'm in the vicinity of my nieces or nephews. I find myself agreeing or disagreeing with many things online, but I don't voice my opinion.

So what will become of me? Will I turn back into you, Skinny Me? I'm not sure. At the moment, no, but in the future? My voice often leaves me, why not my physical presence, too? And where will it end, will I just keep fading until I am unnoticeable?

Why am I like this? Societal pressure on women? Low self-esteem? Introversion? I don't know, but I keep thinking about those report cards from school. 'She is a consciousness pupil who needs to speak up more in class.' Yet, I was content if I knew the answer, and didn't feel the need for everyone else, including the teacher, to know that I knew the answer. Hermione Granger, I was not. So it doesn't feel like low self-confidence. Societal pressures? Sure, I definitely can't escape those. I am an introvert, I have no shame in admitting this (you know, quietly).

I don't know what else to tell you, Skinny Me. I don't know what the answer is. I'm not going to change overnight. I hope that one day I'll be happy, or at least content, to take up the space I do. One day I won't feel like an imposition on other's time. That day isn't today, and it probably isn't tomorrow, either. But while there are women of all shapes and sizes out there, owning their space and demanding more, then there is hope. And, for the moment at least, I can

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keep supporting them in my own quiet way, until my voice raises loud enough to join them, and I take up the space I deserve.

Yours sincerely,

Fat Me