

A False Sense of “Thin” Security by Deb Lemire



The women walk into the room and find their seats. Some are chatty, some hope they are invisible, some wait until the very last minute and slide in at the back. All of them, hoping that a workshop called “Fat & Happy” will not talk too much about being “fat” and a lot about how they can be “happy” with their bodies.

The workshop begins. I explain to them that when we say “fat” we are referring to women who are physically fat as well as those that perceive themselves to be fat. I explain the media’s images of false beauty and the diet industry’s relentless insistence that we participate in hating ourselves unless we change how we look, effects *all* women regardless of her actual size or shape. I give examples of the misinformation, exaggerated statistics and out right lies, all told in the name of the almighty dollar. I make clear the link between our culture’s obsession with thinness and the current hysteria on obesity with the increased incidents of eating disorders and disordered eating. I remind them that size and shape are not a reflection of our morality, self worth or horrible childhood as some talk shows would have us believe.

The women begin to talk. They share their stories. We laugh, we empathize, we begin to recognize the common ground we, as women, stand on when it comes to the diet industry’s patriarchal approach to trap us in a vicious cycle of self hate. And then it happens. A woman of size will raise her hand and then turn to a woman, who by current standards would be considered “average” or “normal” size, and asks with a mixture of anger, envy, pain and fear...“What are *you* doing here?”

It’s an uncomfortable moment for all of us in the room. But it is the most telling and the most important thing that happens in this workshop. Now we can talk about the reality. The reality that the diet industry and those that perpetuate it, participate in it, support it, feed off if it, is not there to bring women together under the common goal of becoming healthy and beautiful (meaning thin). It is a brilliantly designed tool to dilute women’s power by separating us from our money and from each other.

If a thin woman talks about her issues with her body image, a fat woman says “what do you know about it, you’re thin!” If a fat woman talks about finding her self esteem and loving herself as she is, the thin woman says “well you’re just looking for an excuse to stay fat!” And we stand divided.

We spend 50 billion dollars a year on the diet industry. This includes books, magazines and talk shows, surgeries, diet drugs and supplements, as well as exercise equipment, gym memberships and weight loss programs bought with a mixture of guilt and high pressure sales. And while some of that money is spent by men, *most* of it is spent by women. Imagine what we could do if we stopped *buying* into the self-hatred machine. We could house the homeless, feed the hungry, provide education and medical coverage for all and still have enough money to put a woman in the Whitehouse. We would have power! **50 billion dollars** worth of power. We would rule the world. Hmmm.....maybe that is why they want to keep us distracted and weak from hunger.