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## Getting to the Place Where Body Size Doesn't Matter

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## Getting to the Place Where Body Size Doesn't Matter

By **J. Richelle Joe**  
UCF Forum columnist  
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Society's fascination with weight is a type of discrimination and prejudice.



Columnist J. Richelle Joe says she wants to focus on being strong, staying active and going to some of her favorite travel destinations, such as this one on Table Mountain in South Africa.

Humans have a weird fascination with body size. We associate body size with health status, emotional well-being, and self-esteem. We even ascribe worth to individuals based on how large or small their bodies are at any given moment in time.

Author and educator Roxane Gay wrote poignantly about this in *Hunger: A Memoir of (My) Body* and helped me recognize how this fascination with body size results in a type

of discrimination and prejudice that is still generally accepted. The treatment she has experienced due to the size of her body is appalling. At the gym, on airplanes, as she has wandered in her own world down the street, others have taken note of her body, judged it, and felt emboldened to either comment about it or treat it as insignificant.

This weird fascination with body size warps into a sense of entitlement where others' bodies are open for commentary.

I have committed to regular exercise because movement is necessary; it is life.

I remember a friend commenting on my body size several years ago. She had accurately assessed that I had lost weight and acknowledged the change in my body with a smile and nod of approval. I might have appreciated her comment had I not been in an emotionally fragile state. I had indeed lost weight, unintentionally, but I was not happy. The unhappiness and the weight loss were connected, but the tendency to focus on body size, prioritizing smaller bodies, distracted from the emotional experience that I was having.

Recently, I have been in spaces where conversations have focused on weigh-ins, body measurements, and waist trainers. I typically stand by awkwardly during these conversations, silently hoping for a change of topic. I have no desire to talk about how much I weigh; or to measure my waist, arms, and thighs; or to cinch my mid-section in so tightly that I cannot breathe.

I support other people when they make progress toward their weight or size goals, but I refrain from making those goals for myself. My goals are not focused on size and weight because I don't want my body to be small. I want it to be strong. I want it to feel good. I want it to be able to do things and go places.

I want my body to carry me back to visit Table Mountain and Cape Pointe so that I can see those amazing views of South Africa again. I want my body to be able to swim and snorkel in turquoise waters while on vacation. I want my body to be able to dance freely to hip-hop, house, and Latin music until the DJ gets tired. And I want my body to reflect an internal peace that is undisturbed by others' assessments or expectations of my external presentation.

I have committed to regular exercise because movement is necessary; it is life. I do this with a team of trainers and a fierce group of people who get up at 5 a.m. to put in the work before going to work. I am grateful for the community that we have cultivated, but I decline to participate in weigh-ins and weight-loss challenges.

I do weigh myself; however, I have made the decision not to hyper-focus on my weight and body size. Instead, I choose to pay attention when my body speaks to me. I check in with my body before and after a workout, and throughout the workout, I monitor my breathing, energy level, and physical output. Rather than its weight or size, I focus on my body's abilities. Is it able to endure an intense workout without threatening to collapse? Can it breathe rhythmically to avoid an asthma attack? Can it lift, run, jump,

or move as much, if not more, than it did the last time? Can it still do that two-minute plank? These are the questions I ask of my body because questions of weight just don't matter to me as much.

Since making this shift in my approach to my body I have become more kind to myself. I have liberated myself from the pressure of attaining an elusive, arbitrary weight. I chart my progress differently, and by doing so, I celebrate my body much more often. I also respond more promptly to its need for rest and replenishment.

I have since found the weight that I had lost all those years ago when my friend noticed the change in my body. Along with the weight, I have also found an abiding love for self and deep commitment to holistic wellness.

I am no health and fitness expert, but for me, that is the win!

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