



All Shapes and Sizes

“Can We Talk?” ... About Fat Shaming?

By **Nancy**, September 10, 2014 at 9:36 pm



Following the death of comedic icon Joan Rivers, NPR's "[Fresh Air](#)" played excerpts from interviews she has done throughout the years. In 1991, she told Terry Gross that she constantly dieted and believed that she was fat. Gross seemed perplexed by this, stating "But you're so thin. Do you really believe that you're fat?" Rivers insisted that she did and has always been ashamed of her body. "When someone writes 'fat, fat, water rat' in your yearbook, that sticks with you." Rivers was 58 years old at the time, and she still bore the scars of teasing she received as a teenager.

Talking about Joan Rivers gets complicated because of the nature of her comedy. She built a career around being shocking and joking about taboo subjects, such as abortion and sex. But in her role as a fashion critic, many of her statements were cringe-worthy or downright offensive.

In an interview with Howard Stern she said this about Lena Dunham: "She is sending out a message to people saying 'it's OK, stay fat, get diabetes, everybody die.'" Of Janeane Garofalo at the 1997 Emmys: "Is she a pig or what?" She made fat jokes about Adele and apparently called Kim Kardashian's baby "ugly," although I can't confirm that because I refuse to

MEET THE BLOGGER



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Raised in the 'burbs, I currently live with my husband, teen-aged son, and a Westie with a mind of his own.

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click through to anything Kardashian-related.

I can't explain why someone who was so clearly wounded by taunts about her physical appearance would hurl such vicious insults. And on balance, I like that Rivers pushed the envelope. In interviews, she stated that she uses humor to get people talking about difficult issues. And I think that on balance, the world was a better place with her in it.

As strong and caustic as Rivers was, a part of her seemed tender and wounded. Perhaps she used the insults out of anger. Or to hide her pain. I suspect a dissertation could be written on the paradox that was Joan Rivers.

She was an example of the harm that shaming someone about her body can do. And unfortunately, some of her jokes only served to pay that hurt forward.

A 2013 [study](#) out of the Florida State University College of Medicine indicated that fat shaming was actually correlated with weight gain. Those who are shamed about their size might turn to overeating and inactivity as a means of coping with the emotions they experience. Stress activates the release of cortisol in the brain, which triggers cravings for calorie- and fat-dense foods.

[Researchers](#) from University College London noted that weight discrimination undermines people's confidence, and as a result they might avoid physical activity out of fear of being embarrassed.

Throughout her 81 years, Joan Rivers survived a lot. Professional failure. The loss of her husband by suicide. A period of estrangement from her daughter. I wonder if she ever made peace with her own body, though.