

[00:00:00.39] ANTHONY SIS: 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.

[00:00:08.64] [UPBEAT MUSIC]

[00:00:11.42] When you hear the words "body size," what do you immediately think of-- weight, height, or both? On today's show, we'll be concluding the conversation of body size with our very special guest, Mia Ferraina. We'll be kicking off this episode right where we left off in part one of episode 18. My name's Anthony Sis.

[00:00:31.53] TORAL PATEL: My name is Toral Patel.

[00:00:33.12] ANTHONY SIS: And you're listening to the Inclusive Excellence Podcast.

[00:00:36.52] [UPBEAT MUSIC]

[00:00:55.14] [MUSIC FADES]

[00:00:58.58] TORAL PATEL: Does your body size impact the way you see yourself or the way you perceive yourself?

[00:01:03.31] MIA FERRAINA: Mmm, definitely. I mean, I think it does for me. I think it does for other people I've talked to--

[00:01:09.45] TORAL PATEL: Uh-huh. It does for me, for sure.

[00:01:10.87] MIA FERRAINA: Yeah. Who maybe have similar identities or appearances. It impacts my ability to feel confident or powerful.

[00:01:20.58] And I think that overlaps with gender for me, for sure, being a shorter woman and being relatively younger than the people I work with, for the most part, not just in my office but just overall younger in the workforce, and feeling like I either can't assert what I feel is the right thing to do, or the right solution to a problem, or feeling as though I would be overstepping.

[00:01:49.97] I worry a lot about overstepping. And I don't know that I really am. I think sometimes I just worry that I am, because I feel small.

[00:01:59.15] It's weird to feel both fat and small at the same time. But I think depending on the situation, I can be very aware of my weight in terms of body size. But in others, I'm more hyper-aware of my height and my stature.

[00:02:14.27] And if I'm standing with someone, especially, like at a networking event or something, I feel that intimidation factor, even if that's not what that person is trying to convey. Just the idea of looking up at someone and trying to have a conversation. Or

they're probably just trying to hear me better, but that almost patronizing feeling when someone bends over to try and hear you. It's like, can we just go sit down somewhere so I don't feel like you're my dad bending over me or something?

[00:02:46.37] So yeah. It definitely, definitely impacts the way you feel.

[00:02:48.41] TORAL PATEL: I find myself if I'm sitting and somebody walks into my office, I immediately stand up.

[00:02:54.71] MIA FERRAINA: Mm-hmm.

[00:02:55.22] TORAL PATEL: Or ask them to sit down.

[00:02:56.63] MIA FERRAINA: Yep. Agreed.

[00:02:56.93] TORAL PATEL: And even when I stand up, I also take two steps back so that I'm not straining my neck to look up at you, and that we are being able to look eye to eye a little bit. And so I find myself always taking a step back from people, just so I can feel like I'm really talking to you, and looking at you in the eye, and not straining up to look at you and make it more obvious how short I am.

[00:03:17.93] So I try to even out that playing field as much as I can. And I-- nowadays, I don't even think about it. It's just automatic that I just--

[00:03:25.38] MIA FERRAINA: Yeah.

[00:03:25.76] TORAL PATEL: If somebody walks in, if they remain standing, I stand up.

[00:03:29.15] MIA FERRAINA: Yeah.

[00:03:30.08] ANTHONY SIS: Height for me is a huge privilege that I have. And I mean, I jokingly will tell my sister, how's the weather down there? She's 4' 11" too.

[00:03:37.07] Jokingly, like among ourselves, right? But I would never say it in public or in a professional setting, because I don't know how that would impact her personally, right? And I would never want to belittle her in public like that, due to her height.

[00:03:47.39] So it's something, for me, that I've never really thought about. So I'm fascinated.

[00:03:50.10] MIA FERRAINA: Yeah.

[00:03:50.48] TORAL PATEL: I mean, but even like when you go to amusement parks, really staring at the requirement for the rides, because that's a genuine concern, that I might be too short to sit on a particular ride.

[00:04:00.86] MIA FERRAINA: Yeah.

[00:04:00.98] TORAL PATEL: I mean, most of them I'm not. But I know nobody else that I go to the park would bother even looking at it.

[00:04:07.79] ANTHONY SIS: I don't, yeah.

[00:04:08.00] TORAL PATEL: But I actually look to be like, how many inches? And it's 42 inches. I'm like, OK, I can go on that.

[00:04:13.16] MIA FERRAINA: Mm-hmm.

[00:04:13.43] TORAL PATEL: But I actually look at it, because there might be a potential that I can't go on it.

[00:04:18.23] MIA FERRAINA: Yeah. I think of almost just the added dynamic, like when someone walks into your office and says, oh, do you have a minute? Depending on a lot of different things, you feel like you have to say you have a minute, right? Whether they're a superior to you, maybe their age, maybe their gender.

[00:04:33.05] And I just think body size is another one of those factors that makes me feel more intimidated, maybe, by people, into saying, yeah, totally, I have a minute. And wanting them to sit down so that they stop standing over me. It's interesting.

[00:04:50.41] It impacts the way I view myself with weight, too, but in a very different way. I don't know if either of you have ever been weighed publicly, but it's a very strange feeling.

[00:04:59.21] TORAL PATEL: I would never.

[00:05:00.05] ANTHONY SIS: Publicly? How so?

[00:05:01.94] MIA FERRAINA: Well, I mean, I guess I haven't necessarily experienced this in a workplace. I think it used to be a big thing to do Biggest Loser in your workplace.

[00:05:09.47] TORAL PATEL: Yes.

[00:05:09.80] ANTHONY SIS: Oh, my goodness. That show.

[00:05:10.28] MIA FERRAINA: And do those competitions. So I'm glad that we have realized as a society that that's probably not a great plan.

[00:05:18.26] But even doctors' offices-- I don't know how yours is set up, but my doctor's office literally has the scale in the hallway--

[00:05:26.39] TORAL PATEL: Yes.

[00:05:26.72] ANTHONY SIS: Yeah.

[00:05:27.05] MIA FERRAINA: --where people are making their next appointment. So there's people sitting at a desk. There's someone standing there talking to the person at the desk.

[00:05:34.82] ANTHONY SIS: Oh, really?

[00:05:35.54] MIA FERRAINA: It's a super-narrow hallway, so people are walking behind you, potentially, as you're getting weighed. And logically, no one's probably looking at the number that's coming up when I step on the scale. But just the physical environment of it--

[00:05:51.37] TORAL PATEL: True.

[00:05:51.71] MIA FERRAINA: --feels very public.

[00:05:54.59] TORAL PATEL: Yes.

[00:05:54.95] MIA FERRAINA: And like people could judge you if they wanted. And again, I think about if I was a bigger person, if I was, quote, "super-fat," I would probably block the majority of that hallway. So now, someone is waiting for me to get weighed before they can walk by.

[00:06:11.21] TORAL PATEL: Walk by.

[00:06:11.39] MIA FERRAINA: I just can't imagine that added layer, right? I just-- it's hard.

[00:06:15.53] TORAL PATEL: I find myself at doctors' offices taking off every sweater.

[00:06:18.83] MIA FERRAINA: Mm-hmm.

[00:06:19.70] TORAL PATEL: If I have a scarf on, my purse, I'm going to take my shoes off. Whatever is going to help lower that number is very important to me.

[00:06:27.95] ANTHONY SIS: That number. Why do we put so much emphasis, I think, on the number, and--

[00:06:31.52] TORAL PATEL: BMI!

[00:06:32.81] ANTHONY SIS: Body Mass Index, right?

[00:06:34.61] TORAL PATEL: Yeah. And I guess another thing about doctors' offices, too, is the way that doctors respond to people who are fat is oftentimes really dismissive. We hear this with women of color giving birth.

[00:06:48.56] There's a lot of different populations that doctors are statistically more likely to dismiss their concerns, and fat people is one of them. If they're saying, oh, I have this ache or this ailment, or I'm worried about this lump, or whatever, a lot of times it can be dismissed as, you just need to lose weight.

[00:07:04.31] Or I remember as a kid, being told-- I was always in that obese BMI zone. And I was always told every time I went to the doctor, you'll be fine as soon as you grow. You'll be fine as soon as you grow.

[00:07:15.17] And I never grew, height-wise. I'm still the same height as I was that whole time. So if they had maybe given me some actual tools to be a, quote unquote, "healthier" weight at the time, which I guess gets into weird diet-shaming culture, little kids. So I don't know if that's ideal.

[00:07:34.19] But they never really gave me any resources or ideas. They just said, oh, as soon as you grow, you'll be fine. And I think it's an even bigger problem as you get into people who are bigger and bigger sizes, that it's often just attributed to their weight. It's just because they're obese.

[00:07:48.68] I hear people who say, that person was morbidly obese. They died because they were obese. Well, no. They died because they had other health complications. But I think a lot of times, it's easy to say, oh, just lose some weight, and all your problems will be fixed. But that's not often the case.

[00:08:04.88] ANTHONY SIS: Yeah. It's-- as I mentioned, I'm about 190, 192, and technically considered overweight. But there's always this assumption, depending on who I ask. So I mentioned this cultural piece that when I go home sometimes-- so I'm originally from Chicago. Family lives in Chicago.

[00:08:19.19] So when I see my grandma, if I don't see her for a long period of time, the first thing she always comments on is my weight, right? So she'll look at me. She'll be like, oh. She'll give me a hug. And she's really short, too. She's actually shorter than 4' 11". So she's literally half my height, in some ways.

[00:08:31.76] And I'm hugging her. And she's like, oh, you gained a little weight. And I'm just like, OK. You know, what am I supposed to say? She's my grandma, right?

[00:08:37.70] TORAL PATEL: Mm-hmm.

[00:08:37.85] ANTHONY SIS: But then there'll be other times where she'll be like, oh, my gosh. You're so skinny. Are you not eating?

[00:08:41.33] TORAL PATEL: Yeah.

[00:08:41.42] ANTHONY SIS: And I'm like, I am. But I could have sworn six months ago you told me I was eating too much.

[00:08:46.68] TORAL PATEL: Yeah.

[00:08:47.49] ANTHONY SIS: So I mean, I don't do it because of her. I don't put that in my head. But it's just-- it's a weird thing that upon first seeing somebody who's so close and dear to my heart, that it's the first thing she always has to comment on is my weight.

[00:08:59.36] And it's just weird. I've always been that-- growing up, I was a lot bigger. I was getting more round. Fifth, sixth grade, I started walking from my house to school, because I lived in the neighborhood where I went to school. And I lost a ton of weight because of that.

[00:09:13.29] And so then that led to this on-and-off journey of just-- my body weight, I just generally realized fluctuates a lot. I typically lose the most weight when I do fluctuate, in my legs and everything.

[00:09:25.10] And my stomach stays. So I'll have that little stomach. I'll have that little gut that stands out. And then depending on who you ask, it's all subjective.

[00:09:33.68] And so I'm just-- I think for me, I focus a lot more of how I perceive myself to be so that it doesn't then impact me in spaces outside of my own personal home. So when I think about work, and I think about the gym-- and I've talked about this too, how I view the gym now as more of a de-stressor, rather than viewing it as for the sake of losing weight. Because when I did view it that way, I would be like, oh, I don't want to go.

[00:09:57.21] TORAL PATEL: Yeah.

[00:09:57.56] ANTHONY SIS: But when I view it as a way for me to de-stress, and as part of my own well-being for my own sanity and my own self-care, then the incentive for me is a lot greater. So then I think, OK, I have all this on my plate. I'm just going to put it to the side for an hour, an hour and a half, go to the gym, de-stress, listen to music.

[00:10:14.87] It's just for me. I recognize if I invest the time in my wellbeing by going to the gym, then I'm going to reap so many more benefits out of it, rather than when I used to focus it on just being for the purpose of losing weight. Not to say that it's going to work for everybody. But that's just something that, for me, has been really helpful in really reframing my own mindset of going to the gym and stuff. It's, you know.

[00:10:36.44] TORAL PATEL: But you have to remember that when you are overweight, that going to the gym is an extremely scary thought.

[00:10:42.74] MIA FERRAINA: Yup. That's what I was just thinking.

[00:10:43.87] ANTHONY SIS: Yeah. Yeah.

[00:10:44.15] TORAL PATEL: Yeah. It is very hard to take that first step and actually walk into a gym. So this year, and Anthony--

[00:10:50.48] MIA FERRAINA: It's hard to be relaxed when you feel like everyone's watching you!

[00:10:52.94] ANTHONY SIS: Yeah. It is a weird spectacle of sorts, yeah.

[00:10:53.44] TORAL PATEL: Yes. Yes. And nobody really is. Everybody is doing their own thing. Probably nobody's watching you. But it's this thought that everybody's watching me because I'm the overweight person here in this place, right? And I can't walk--

[00:11:05.90] MIA FERRAINA: I do see all those pictures on the news and TV and so forth. It's like, the obesity epidemic! And it chops your head off. Or it's people in the gym who are overweight. So it makes you feel like people are watching you.

[00:11:17.51] TORAL PATEL: Yes. But then there's mirrors everywhere. And you're like, if you're not in front of me, you can see my back. You can see every angle.

[00:11:23.23] MIA FERRAINA: Yeah. Yeah.

[00:11:23.51] ANTHONY SIS: Yeah.

[00:11:24.05] TORAL PATEL: And then it's like, where am I jiggling as I'm walking on this treadmill?

[00:11:27.59] MIA FERRAINA: Mm-hmm.

[00:11:27.77] TORAL PATEL: All of those thoughts are playing in your head while you're doing it. So this year, my New Year's resolution has been to take care of me in every aspect-- emotionally, mentally, physically.

[00:11:36.92] MIA FERRAINA: Good for you.

[00:11:37.29] TORAL PATEL: And so I joined CrossFit.

[00:11:38.99] MIA FERRAINA: Oh!

[00:11:40.01] ANTHONY SIS: That's intense.

[00:11:40.85] TORAL PATEL: It is the most-- and I-- it took me two months. I had to think about it all of November and all of December to work my way up to say, OK, so then in December, I did three one-on-one sessions with just a personal trainer.

[00:11:54.50] And even at that point, I was like, oh, I cannot do this with other people. I didn't want other people to see me.

[00:12:00.05] MIA FERRAINA: Yeah.

[00:12:01.13] TORAL PATEL: Physically trying to do stuff that they are all able to do, and I can't.

[00:12:04.63] MIA FERRAINA: Mm-hmm.

[00:12:05.31] TORAL PATEL: And so I said, I can't do this with other people. I'm going to have to continue these one-on-one sessions. And the only thing that actually made me go to the group session is the cost.

[00:12:13.29] MIA FERRAINA: Mmm. Yeah.

[00:12:13.97] TORAL PATEL: Because the one-on-one session was way more expensive than actually joining the group. And so that's the only thing that, to this day-- so I've been going for about a month now. And it's the only thing that gets me there, is this, OK, I have to go with these people.

[00:12:26.72] And now once-- having gone there, I find that they are some of the most supportive people anywhere. And they all talk about, this is where I started. And I wasn't able to lift this much weight, and I wasn't able to walk this much, or do this many jumping jacks, or whatever it is.

[00:12:41.81] So you feel like, OK, I can be there. Give me a year, and maybe I can get where you are, right? But it was probably one of the most hardest things I've done in a really long time, is to actually say, I'm going to do this, and I'm going to do this for myself. And even after I tried it, I was like, nope. I can't. It took a lot of me getting out of my own head to say, I'm going to do this.

[00:13:01.34] MIA FERRAINA: Yeah.

[00:13:01.55] TORAL PATEL: And same thing-- I have to do it for health reasons now.

[00:13:04.46] MIA FERRAINA: Mm-hmm.

[00:13:04.76] TORAL PATEL: Not necessarily to lose weight.

[00:13:06.47] MIA FERRAINA: Yeah.

[00:13:06.80] TORAL PATEL: But that's what got me there.

[00:13:08.45] MIA FERRAINA: Yeah. I think that's the thing I struggle with, in terms of working out in any form, whether it's at the gym or just doing something outside, is that balance between accepting my body as it is and trying to change it with food or exercise, and that idea of body positivity and how much-- how you define it.

[00:13:32.03] Some people are like, well, I'm body positive as long as you're not obese. Or, I'm body positive as long as you can shop in a standard department store, or whatever. Some people have that caveat, whether explicit or implied.

[00:13:45.02] But even I struggle with that, of like, OK, do I just love myself the way I am and say, I don't enjoy going to the gym, or enjoy working out, so I'm just not going to? Or do I say, I'm not healthy at this size and I need to change? And what does that imply about people who are bigger than me, or heavier than me?

[00:14:05.28] I think we talked in our group about you can be a lot of different sizes and have, quote unquote, "healthy numbers," in terms of doctors' office-type numbers. And my cholesterol is too high. So by definition of the numbers, I need to work out and eat healthier.

[00:14:21.32] But I struggle with-- I really fluctuate. And I'll say, I think that's even linked to mental health is-- I go through these moments where I don't care what people think of me. I don't care how I look. I don't care how my clothes fit. I'm going to eat what I want when I want, and love myself for who I am.

[00:14:36.89] And then I go to the other end of the extreme. And neither of those are healthy, right, mentally or physically. But it's really-- something I'm still working through is what really is body positivity for me? And where is "healthy" physically, while also being forgiving of myself mentally?

[00:14:57.59] ANTHONY SIS: Yeah. And I'm just thinking about, we talked a little bit about how it impacts how we show up at work, too. But having been a part of that group with you, Mia, with the Body Positivity group, have there been any changes in how you've perceived your own body image, specifically at work, in terms of the things that we've talked about, the adjustments that you've made with the foot thing, or even just your body size as a whole?

[00:15:21.17] MIA FERRAINA: I think it's just encouraged me to be more forward. I was-- and this actually wasn't with Cornell, but just in the Ithaca area, a day-long retreat that I was going to be a part of-- and it was a chair like those Cafe Jennie chairs. And I was like, I cannot sit in this chair all day long.

[00:15:39.14] And before that group, I probably-- or before even just knowing and having those conversations with other people about body size, I probably wouldn't have

said anything. I probably would have just sucked it up and squeezed myself into the chair for an eight-hour day.

[00:15:52.25] But I think just talking with other people has given me the courage to say things more, the courage to go to that person and say, hey, I think I saw this in your closet. Do you mind if I take your foot stool? Or courage to say, I'm going to grab a chair from a different room, because this chair does not work for me. I don't think I would have said that before having the unity of other people with a common experience.

[00:16:14.75] TORAL PATEL: So I know that there's this group that exists. And I think they're giving out just an amazing message, and it's giving a lot of confidence to people. But what can other Cornell employees do who are not members of this group, or who don't attend these meetings? What can they do in terms of creating that positive atmosphere for individuals?

[00:16:32.84] MIA FERRAINA: Yeah. I think it varies depending on who you work with. But for me, I think it's a lot about those food-based meetings.

[00:16:42.26] Have a variety of different foods there. Don't make commentary about who's eating which foods. Or, oh, I got these for the people who are being good. Or just buy a variety of food and put it on the table and let people eat! Just stop making it a big deal.

[00:16:58.55] I would say depending on what area of campus you work on, there are different things, right? There are some people who plan events, and do more giveaways and stuff. And that's like, make sure you have a broad range of sizes. Or try and bring a body positive fat-inclusive speaker to campus.

[00:17:15.83] Or if you work in facilities, make the bathroom stalls bigger. I can hardly turn around. So just-- I think there's something you can do for lots of different parts of campus, depending on where you work.

[00:17:31.49] But I would almost say one of my biggest recommendations is to follow Yr Fat Friend. I don't know if you've ever heard of them. They're an anonymous personality on social media.

[00:17:43.61] ANTHONY SIS: On Instagram, Facebook?

[00:17:44.84] MIA FERRAINA: Yeah.

[00:17:45.23] ANTHONY SIS: OK. OK.

[00:17:46.28] MIA FERRAINA: I know they're at least on Instagram and Twitter. And it's just Y-R, like "yr" fat friend. And they just post so many valuable things, perspectives from fat people. I just saw a story the other day that was like, how to be a fat ally, ways

to make sure that people who are somewhere on the fat spectrum trust straight-sized people more.

[00:18:11.27] Just all sorts of different personal experiences, tips. They do a lot of the asking the question, where the audience can respond. So you see a really wide range of experiences. Or things that you're like, oh, that's just my one friend complaining, you see 10 other people saying that they have that experience, too.

[00:18:27.56] And they're just one of the biggest people that I look to for different advice, encouragement, information about body size overall.

[00:18:37.70] TORAL PATEL: That's amazing.

[00:18:38.79] MIA FERRAINA: Yeah.

[00:18:39.29] TORAL PATEL: Just to add to that Cornell piece, I have to tell you that one of the best things that my current supervisor, Angela, did for me when I first started is actually go through the ergonomic assessment.

[00:18:47.52] MIA FERRAINA: Mm-hmm. And not make you feel bad about it.

[00:18:50.54] TORAL PATEL: Correct.

[00:18:51.08] MIA FERRAINA: Yes.

[00:18:51.38] TORAL PATEL: It was actually just saying, hey, let's make sure that everything is set up the way you want to set up. So let's have the person come in. And that's just how it was presented.

[00:18:57.88] MIA FERRAINA: Yeah. Yeah.

[00:18:58.52] TORAL PATEL: And it was-- it had nothing to do with my size or anything. It was just like, want to make sure that you're comfortable in your office, and that everything is set up the way you want to set up.

[00:19:07.01] MIA FERRAINA: And without the, oh, and it might mean that we have to buy you a \$300 chair. I don't want the caveat with it.

[00:19:14.42] TORAL PATEL: Correct.

[00:19:15.38] MIA FERRAINA: So that I feel guilty taking the recommendation of the analysis person. I don't know what their title is, but--

[00:19:22.64] TORAL PATEL: Yeah.

[00:19:23.45] MIA FERRAINA: To really just offer it openly and say, we'll do what we need to do to make you comfortable, instead of--

[00:19:29.76] TORAL PATEL: That's it. And just keep it simple as that.

[00:19:31.20] MIA FERRAINA: Yeah. Instead of like, oh, the assessment's free, but the stuff that they suggest isn't free.

[00:19:36.47] TORAL PATEL: But the same thing was done for one of our other co-workers who is really tall, right? And so the standard size height doesn't work for them.

[00:19:43.83] MIA FERRAINA: Yeah.

[00:19:44.24] TORAL PATEL: Because they're just tall. And so same thing-- the opposite problem for me. The standard size height doesn't work for me, because then I have to put my chair higher and then my feet dangle.

[00:19:52.28] MIA FERRAINA: Yeah

[00:19:52.67] TORAL PATEL: All day. And then they're swollen when I go home at the end of the day. So just as a supervisor, just taking the extra step, being more conscious that, hey, not everybody might fit the standard size desk, right? And so just being aware, and making it normal for you to say, hey, let's just have somebody come in, assess, make sure everything is OK for you.

[00:20:09.32] MIA FERRAINA: Yeah

[00:20:09.98] TORAL PATEL: Without having to actually talk about because you're tall, or because you're short, or whatever it is.

[00:20:15.05] MIA FERRAINA: And I think not everybody at Cornell works in an office space, too, right? So I'm thinking about broader things aside from the social media suggestion I just gave. Things like offering options of where to sit, or what to do, or where to meet. If someone offered me like, oh, do you want to meet in A or B? I know what space I'm going to be more comfortable in.

[00:20:39.23] Or even just thinking about if you're having a-- a lot of teams that are spread across campus will have some sort of round-up in the morning, where they all meet together. Don't have it in some cramped little office where everyone has to jam in and stand the whole time. Find a space that's comfortable for people to gather.

[00:20:57.74] Or even just thinking about whether you plan team builders or ice breakers or whatever it is, there's a lot of things, I think, in our college or university setting where one person is responsible for planning something for a small- to medium-sized group of people.

[00:21:13.55] I think of it like I think about physical ability accessibility. Your icebreaker should be something that doesn't have to involve you sitting, standing, jumping.

[00:21:23.33] TORAL PATEL: Mm-hmm.

[00:21:24.14] MIA FERRAINA: Try to make it something that everyone can participate in your group.

[00:21:29.09] ANTHONY SIS: It goes back to, as we talked about with getting as much input as possible, but also one of the things that I think is just really important that I've taken away so far with this conversation is the importance of language, too, and how and what we say-- or rather, how we say it is more important than actually what we say sometimes, right?

[00:21:45.47] So thinking about body language, thinking about tone of voice-- those things play such a huge role in how people will feel like they have a sense of belonging, or feel like they're being welcomed and accepted. So that whole piece with the ergonomics assessment, right, and not having to feel like, oh, it's an additional barrier.

[00:22:02.87] And we're going to make sure that you know that by the way that we respond to it. Like, we can afford this, we can't afford that. Well, you already got the assessment. So it's up to you to decide what it is you're going to do with it, but not putting that onus, then, on the person who is getting that assessment--

[00:22:16.19] TORAL PATEL: Correct.

[00:22:16.46] ANTHONY SIS: --to then have to feel like they're a burden, or they're-- because that's the worst way, I feel like, to start a job, if you get that type of assessment when you first start here. And then you're like, oh. Clearly, this means you have to go out of your way. So even if you do have to go out of your way, don't make it very obvious to the other person. And just consider it as common practice to implement with everybody in your team, not just that one person, right?

[00:22:37.88] So it's I think that's something that I keep hearing, of how we say certain things, and how we make people feel is much more important sometimes than what we actually say.

[00:22:46.10] TORAL PATEL: Yeah, I agree.

[00:22:47.24] MIA FERRAINA: Even with terminology, we're talking about how you present an option or something like that. But some people really would rather be called a person of size. Some people really own the word "fat."

[00:22:59.63] And I think you can tell how comfortable people are with different terminology by how they say it. If you're talking with a group who has to order a bunch of shirts for something, when they're like, oh, well, maybe we should order, I don't know,

for bigger people? Just by the way that they say it, you can get a sense of how receptive they'd be to you as someone who's maybe a bigger person.

[00:23:27.02] When we talk about, a lot of times, letting students or staff identify themselves the way they want, if someone calls themselves fat, I'm going to call them fat, too. I think a common experience for people who identify as fat is someone saying, oh, no, you're not fat. You're pretty.

[00:23:42.98] Or-- as if the two are mutually exclusive. Like, you're not fat, you're this. Or like, oh, you're not as big as so-and-so, and comparing. Just don't play that game. Just call them what they wish to be called.

[00:23:58.40] TORAL PATEL: Or even just saying, oh, you're not fat. And I was like, I know you see me, right?

[00:24:02.24] MIA FERRAINA: Mm-hmm.

[00:24:02.87] TORAL PATEL: So don't ignore that, either. I know how big I am, right? And so it's almost like trying to not even talk about it as something that exists. And I was like, well, if you physically see me, then you know how big I am. I know how big I am.

[00:24:16.64] MIA FERRAINA: Yeah.

[00:24:17.24] TORAL PATEL: Right. And so I think that's the part for me. It's like, I wouldn't say you're fat at all.

[00:24:21.26] MIA FERRAINA: I think a lot of identities are tied to calling yourself what you'd like to be called. And if you are autistic person who wants to say autism is a core part of my identity, I want autism first. I think we tend to go for people-first language, like "person of size," or "person with autism."

[00:24:41.45] But sometimes, people want to own that term and put that first. It's a really big part of who they are. And if that person is proud of being fat, then that's their choice. It's not up to you to tell them how they should feel.

[00:24:56.07] ANTHONY SIS: At the end of the day, even if you're not familiar with it, or even if you feel like it might cross certain boundaries, but if they've identified themselves as such, then respect that.

[00:25:04.85] TORAL PATEL: That's their identity.

[00:25:06.20] ANTHONY SIS: Then call them by their identity that they choose to, even if societally speaking, it might be considered something different. So I think that's really key.

[00:25:14.18] As we wrap up this conversation, I think we got one more question, which is we've talked about a lot of things. And I think this is definitely something we could easily probably spend two, three four hours, maybe a whole day session retreat on.

[00:25:26.39] But in terms of, I guess, the final message, final takeaway that you want listeners to take away from our conversation about body size as a whole, and especially how it impacts us at work, what would you say would be that final takeaway message to let people know?

[00:25:41.99] MIA FERRAINA: My biggest takeaway would be just to think critically. I think sometimes in the college or university setting, we can-- especially at a really decentralized place like Cornell-- push things off onto other people like, oh, well, that's not really my area. Or, that's not something that I need to deal with. Or, I don't see students that much. So this isn't relevant to me.

[00:26:04.37] And I think just take a step back and really look at what you do on a day-to-day basis, and how some of what you could do could impact your colleagues, could impact students that maybe you don't directly interact with, but there's a trickle-down. So whether that's you are the purchasing department, and you are thinking about what chairs Cornell is even allowed to buy, maybe they have a certain weight requirement or something.

[00:26:31.40] Or whether you are in-- I don't know, commencement, making sure that the gowns that people wear on one of the biggest occasions of their lives are size-inclusive. I think there's something-- there's at least one thing, right, that every department could do, whether it impacts students or their fellow colleagues. There's always something.

[00:26:53.52] [BRIGHT MUSICAL STING]

[00:26:59.16] ANTHONY SIS: All right, Toral. Time to share our thoughts and reflections on this topic.

[00:27:04.69] So just to start the conversation, I specifically want to acknowledge everything that you shared about yourself and about your experience with this topic. So in terms of listening back to the episode, and to the recording and the interview that we did with Mia, how are you feeling right now with everything that you just shared?

[00:27:22.47] TORAL PATEL: So I guess vulnerable is the right word. We've said that a couple of times already, that this was a very vulnerable episode, and that we shared a lot of personal details.

[00:27:32.20] And so in a way, I feel freeing, because it's not something that I talk about with a lot of people. So it was very freeing to actually have a conversation, and to have a guest here who understands what I'm going through. Not necessarily the same experiences in life, but there are things that we can bond over.

[00:27:48.42] At the same time, I also have this, oh, my god, what did I do, and I really put myself out there, mentality too. And I don't know how I feel about being so vulnerable and so open about the things that we've shared.

[00:28:02.46] So it's a little bit of both. I'm feeling free, and at the same time, not.

[00:28:07.53] ANTHONY SIS: Yeah

[00:28:07.95] TORAL PATEL: I don't know if that makes any sense.

[00:28:09.51] ANTHONY SIS: I think it does. I think there's always that moment-- at least for me, I'll speak for myself-- of whenever I share something that's very vulnerable, I then question, was it worth it? How far did I go? Is this something that I actually want people to listen to?

[00:28:23.37] But I think in listening back to everything that I shared-- and even all three of us, right, Mia, you, and myself-- listening back to it, I think there was just so much valuable information, and just so many gems in terms of experiences and things that personally, for me, that I often don't think about because of my height privilege, in terms of not really having to think too much about body size in terms of weight and height.

[00:28:47.37] And that's also something that, for me, in reflecting back on why I wanted to do this particular episode, it was something that-- I'll be honest with you, and really say that I only focused on the weight piece.

[00:28:58.89] TORAL PATEL: OK.

[00:28:59.19] ANTHONY SIS: I went into this conversation really-- even having the conversation with Mia, talking about just weight in terms of body size. But in having the conversation that we had throughout the interview, I was like, oh, snap. There's other aspects that affect your weight and your body size, and not just how you perceive yourself, but also height as well.

[00:29:17.38] TORAL PATEL: Yup.

[00:29:17.40] ANTHONY SIS: And so that's something that, for me, I think was so insightful to have that moment during the interview. But I guess in reflecting back on it, it's just something that still really stands out for me, that I need to really be-- and it's also, I would say, aside from maybe the topic that we talked about in terms of imposter syndrome, it's one of the very few shows and episodes where we really focus on the intersection of two core identities.

[00:29:39.69] TORAL PATEL: Sure. Yes. Definitely.

[00:29:40.29] ANTHONY SIS: Right? Like height-- height not necessarily being an identity, but something that impacts, right, how we perceive ourselves as a whole. And

so it was nice to have that conversation of the two aspects that make up body size, and how it impacts us in terms of our personal lives, which then alternatively impact how we navigate the world, how we navigate work, how we navigate so many other spaces, right, outside of work as well.

[00:30:02.40] TORAL PATEL: Yeah. And for me, I think, once the episode concluded with our guest, I think I obviously reflected a lot. And I think what I really identified about myself is that that is a salient identity for me, is that my body size is up front and foremost in almost everything that I do. It's not necessarily my gender or my race that impacts my life as much as body size does.

[00:30:24.90] ANTHONY SIS: That's pretty eye-opening. So moving forward, Toral, what are some of the things-- so first off, what are maybe a couple takeaways that you took away from the conversation, in addition to some of the things that we've already talked about? As well as, what are some things that you're going to commit to, to fostering a more inclusive environment in regards to the topic of body size?

[00:30:44.43] TORAL PATEL: In listening to Mia actually share her story, I think there were some things that, even though I have body size issues of my own, are things that I've never had to deal with, in terms of being able to fit in a chair. Or is this person going to be comfortable at a meeting? Those are kinds of things that I don't think about in a work setting.

[00:31:01.06] And so going forward, I think those are the things that I will put into play when we talk about accessibility as a whole. I want to talk about chair sizes, and is this, you know-- are the chairs in a particular conference room going to be accommodating to all different body sizes, and all different heights, right?

[00:31:16.89] And so those kinds of things I think I'm going to have-- it's going to be more forefront in my mind when I'm planning meetings, and thinking about how can I make any space more accommodating, or more accessible to every individual that's going to be walking in the door?

[00:31:30.62] How about you, Anthony? Any takeaways for you?

[00:31:32.79] ANTHONY SIS: So many takeaways I think a lot about. So I think the meeting space thing really stood out to me because oftentimes, especially even as I think about for another program that I oversee, the Inclusive Excellence Academy, I always think about space in terms of how many people can fit in the space.

[00:31:48.39] But I never really have thought about, OK, how are people of different body sizes going to feel comfortable in that particular space?

[00:31:55.66] TORAL PATEL: Sure. Yeah.

[00:31:55.98] ANTHONY SIS: So what type of chairs are going to be there? Are they going to have wheels on them or not? And is that going to make anybody uncomfortable in terms of size or any other accommodation?

[00:32:03.75] So that's something that I think in the planning process-- and I think one of the things that really stood out to me, which I also shared a lot about in terms of how to prevent some of these situations that might happen around body size, is to really plan in an intentional and strategic way.

[00:32:20.03] TORAL PATEL: Right.

[00:32:20.39] ANTHONY SIS: So that you're keeping this in mind before an event, or before a situation happens, not after the fact.

[00:32:25.74] TORAL PATEL: Right.

[00:32:26.06] ANTHONY SIS: So I think for me, I think just being more intentional and explicit about that pre-planning process, and that I am thinking about body size as part of the piece of how are people going to feel in that space? How are people going to adjust to that space when I facilitate a training?

[00:32:39.59] I think that's something that during the day of the event, I'll just be so much more mindful of, of how people are navigating the space in terms of size and in terms of height as well. Because that's something I talked about not really having to think about. But, yeah. There might be some challenges with people who are really tall, or some people who are really short.

[00:32:55.43] TORAL PATEL: Exactly.

[00:32:55.76] ANTHONY SIS: So just keeping that in mind, as well as in the pre-planning for things like the Inclusive Acceptance Academy.

[00:33:01.70] All right, Toral. Well, once again, I just want to thank you for being so vulnerable on this particular show, and on this particular topic. And it was definitely a learning experience for me as well, sharing a little bit more about myself and my role, and how I view my own body size.

[00:33:15.97] So I just want to, in the spirit of micro-affirmations, affirm you in your lived experiences and your identities, the many identities that you carry with you every single day. So thank you. Thank you for being vulnerable on this particular show.

[00:33:30.38] TORAL PATEL: And I want to thank you for acknowledging your privilege when it comes to your height, because I think that is very powerful. And it's a great message to send to others who are listening, that acknowledging your privileges can help really move a conversation forward.

Episode 19: Weighing In on Body Size, Part II
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[00:33:44.07] ANTHONY SIS: Thank you.

[00:33:45.02] [UPBEAT MUSIC]

[00:33:47.39] TORAL PATEL: That's it for this month's show. If you like what you've heard, be sure to subscribe and submit a review on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or SoundCloud. It helps new listeners find us and the show.

[00:33:57.46] Also, if you or a fellow colleague would like to be interviewed for an upcoming episode, please email us at IE-Academy@cornell.edu. My name is Toral Patel.

[00:34:08.17] ANTHONY SIS: My name is Anthony Sis. Thank you for listening to another episode of the Inclusive Excellence Podcast.

[00:34:13.96] TORAL PATEL: This podcast is a production of the Department of Inclusion and Workforce Diversity, in collaboration with Cornell Broadcast Studio.

[00:34:21.83] [MUSIC FADES]

[00:34:26.39] A special shout-out and thank you to Bert Odom-Reed, our sound engineer, for making us sound wonderful each and every episode.

[00:34:33.00] ALL: Thanks, Bert!