

Below is a transcript of Lindo Bacon's Keynote Talk at the 2018 Association for Size Diversity and Health Conference

Introduction: I'm really really really grateful that Linda Bacon is here and Linda is gonna bless us with their keynote called *When Self-love Isn't Enough: Cultivating Body Appreciation in an Unjust World*. Thank you. [Clapping]

Lindo: Thank you everybody. [Clapping]

[Hi. I'm recording this next 90 seconds after the fact as we lost audio. I do have notes, and this was the opening: "I'm a bit awed being up here – and not without a bit of conflict. So many people could inhabit this stage with powerful impact. I'm conscious that I've got a loud voice in this movement – and every time I'm heard, that means someone else isn't.

I offer this talk with a lot of humility and respect for the opportunity." The remainder of the audio is directly from the event.]

...making our mark on the world and I appreciate that I have this platform. I'm going to be talking in a lot more depth about that soon but I also just want to acknowledge every single one of you in the room for what you do to make this a better world, so thank you. [Applause] All right, so, content, now I've got to remember what it is that I wanted to say. [Laughter].

Privilege: My Story

I wanted to start by acknowledging that I have enormous privilege. Some of the privileges I have include my white skin, being able bodied, slender, neurotypical, high socioeconomic status, English is my first language, I'm a US citizen. There are a lot of other things that have helped to get me this platform today. I want to first acknowledge that in reflecting back to kind of prepare this talk I've really looked at my career and how I've gotten to this place. I have worked really really hard. I mean three graduate degrees takes a lot of time and energy, right, it kind of puts me in the class of being one of the best educated people in the world from an academic perspective, but we know of course education comes in better forms than that. And it took a lot of work to be able to do that and to excel and get through that platform, but I'm aware that there's absolutely no way that I could have gotten those credentials or that I would be standing in front of you today without some of those privileges that I mentioned here.

You may have heard the expression born with a silver spoon in their mouth. Well that applies to me almost literally. When I was born my parents actually bought a silver baby spoon and had it engraved with my name and birthdate on it. They were saving it until the day that I was to have a bat mitzvah and I would become a woman and then they would present it to me. It was their pride in being able to give me advantages. Now, their story about how we got to the place we got to was that there's an American dream out there that - my family, I'm third generation American - my grandparents were penniless immigrants when they came in to the United States. They were fleeing racialized genocide, the pogroms that were happening in Poland. They're Jews. And they came here with no money whatsoever. And they came here and met up with a lot of anti-semitism. And my parents in retelling the whole story of from rags to riches say that this is America, that people face adversity and anybody, if you try hard enough can overcome it. And that's the narrative that I was fed all my life. But as I asked my relatives stories of how we actually got to the place we did, there was another narrative that I started to see. For example, I'll

just trace the lineage starting with my paternal grandmother because she's the one that really made the family fortune. [I'm hearing a little echo, are you hearing that too? No, it might be my hearing disability, so okay thank you.] So?

Audience: Grandmother...

Lindo: Grandmother, thank you. [laughter] my grandmother, when she got here she didn't speak English. She was able to get a job but it was the only job that was really available to young Jewish girls who didn't speak English and it was in a factory where she was horribly exploited, worked very long hours under unsafe conditions and made barely any money. She was living with 8 other people in a two-room building. [And I just have to say I do actually have a hearing disability and I'm really encountering a lot of difficulties, so now with the volume with something going on here. I don't think there's anything you can do because nobody else is hearing the echo, right ok, so other people are hearing it. So anyway we have a really wonderful tech guy Roosevelt back there and I think he's just gonna maybe fiddle with some buttons and we'll see what happens. Thank you.]

So she was working in this factory. Eight people crowded in a small tenement apartment in the Lower East Side in New York. She saw no way out of it. So what did she do? Ingenuity. She stole from the factor, she stole a sewing machine, she stole materials. The way she learned English was by listening to people around her, so she was learning the silk trade from hearing about what was going on in the factory. The business she started was passed through my father, my brother now owns it and he employs 50 people in it. When I asked - the name of the business is bacon and gram - and so I was asking my grandmother the story of, well, who is Graham, not somebody I've ever heard of.

And the day she answered that question was the day I became a feminist. What she said was nobody would do business with a woman so I made up a fictitious business partner who was male. And her way of doing business then was saying "oh Mr. Graham's not available right now, but he's asked me to help you." [laughter]

So, how did my family fortune get started? Through criminal activity, lying, that's how you overcome systemic injustice. [laughter and applause]

Let's just trace it to the next generation and we'll talk about my father who greatly expanded the money that we had. My father, the first time he went to school he failed out and I asked him why and he said it was too much partying with his frat boys. So he's not the model of responsibility when you when you start to think about that in terms. But my grandmother put a lot of pressure on him, she needed somebody to understand more of the business side of things, to help her to expand the business and she was really dead set on him being able to get an education. The way he got his education was through the GI Bill. The GI Bill was denied to a lot of people of color, right, and the african-americans that did make use of the GI Bill could only go to the black colleges which at that time were considered highly inferior and were also quite overcrowded. So the fact that my father got his education was because of his white skin. Then also he was able to buy a house. There was redlining in our neighborhood so that meant that people of color weren't able to buy into that neighborhood. The only way he got a home loan was because he had white skin, it was denied to people of color.

This is Not a Meritocracy

So there's a hidden story behind to my family wealth. This is not a story of meritocracy, that anybody can make it. We made it because we have enormous privileges that supported it. The fact that I am here speaking to you today is not because I worked hard in school, it's because of all of the support that I got that made it possible.

Now, intellectually I understood all of this, but two months ago it became vividly clear to me on a much more deep level. I want to share that story with you in hopes that it will also move you to understand the depth of all of this. So I was in Georgia a couple months ago and I was traveling. I had just finished a speaking gig and I was feeling pretty free and just doing the touristy thing. And I was in a museum and I met a fellow traveler, a guy about my age. We connected and we were having a really good time talking. He too was a tourist.

He hadn't been in Atlanta for 25 years but he had grown up there. And so the day before he had spent at his old childhood haunts thinking about what it was like growing up there. And he's telling me stories about childhood and there's a lot that we're connecting on. For example, the massive amounts of drugs we were doing in our teenage years, early 20s, right, the dealing that it led to to support our habit. And I won't tell you a lot of the shameful stories that we shared with one another about the things that we also did kind of caught up in that culture. But there was a difference in the trajectory of our lives. He's been in prison for the last 25 years for doing the same things that I did. Me, on the other hand, I had access to the resources to turn my life around and head in a very different trajectory. So this man, oh did I mention that he was african-american? Okay, I mean, maybe that's implied almost in that kind of a story, right? We know that that's a very typical scenario around racism.

So you know I was doing my drugs from the safety of suburbia where the police don't come and watch us. We were doing the same drug but just different forms, I was doing cocaine, the designer form of it, and he was doing crack, the street form, which makes you a lot more vulnerable in a lot of other ways, right? So, I'm not naïve. The fact that I'm here right now and that I've been able to build this platform has a lot to do with privilege. It's not about things, about all of the hard work that I put in. There are a lot of people in the world that are working much much harder than me and have a lot of unique skills and talents that they can bring to the world, but they don't get supported in developing them and being seen. So how about if we just take a moment to just sit with that?

HAES book: unexamined privilege

All right, so, when we don't stop to think about our privilege and all we see is our privilege, we think that everything in the world is like, we view it through a lens that we've been fed. And it's hard for us to understand things from others' perspectives. As a result we all end up making a lot of mistakes. We absorb this toxic culture, we have projections and ideas about people that we lay onto them and end up not being able to see them, maybe limiting their lives in certain ways. So it becomes incumbent on us to try to take a deeper examination and get a sense of what is it that I'm not seeing that's stopping me from being able to be the compassionate caring person in creating this just world that I want.

And as I look over my life in retrospect I can see a lot of mistakes I made from unexamined privilege and there are mistakes that I've made that have caused a lot of damage to our health at every size movement and so I want to start by apologizing to you for that and acknowledging that and I want to talk about some of the lessons that I've learned over the years and leave you then with some suggestions about

how all of us can grapple with our privilege so that we can work better towards that world that we all want.

So many of you are familiar with the first book that I wrote, it's now 10 years since that book came out and I have many criticisms of that book today and probably the biggest criticism that I want to share with you right now is the fact that it's built on this whole model of personal behavior change, that you've got control over your world and if only you deal with your attitude towards food and your activity habits and work on self-acceptance and all those kinds of things, that that's the formula for success and good health. And the systemic analysis that was in there, that did exist to some degree but it wasn't placed in context.

HAES book: neoliberalism

Now here's what we know from science and what I say now is something that is well accepted in the public health field, it's well accepted in many of our government documents. And that's that personal behaviors like eating and activity actually have very little effect on our health. Now I know that public health campaigns are usually built around personal behaviors, but the reality is - which is understood by the researchers and the scientists that are involved in this- is that personal behaviors are just a small component of why we have the health outcomes that we do. Government documents place it somewhere between, place all of the health behaviors tolled together to between five and twenty five percent of health outcome. Most of the documents I think are pointing to the fact of maybe about 10 percent of our health outcome is really about what we eat and activity and all that kind of stuff.

So when we write a book that's all about personal behavior change then we make an incumbent on the individual and say it's your responsibility that you're in this position. You have to take control of your health and that's where the good outcome is. And that's problematic. While personal behavior change is helpful - I don't want to dismiss it, but what I want to do is place it in context. And what we certainly know is that change of all of your lifestyle habits and if you're still dealing with poverty and insecure work and caretaking responsibilities, you're probably not gonna see all that much of an impact in your health. So yes, behavior change can certainly help you to feel more agency in the world, it can improve well-being some extent, but we have to place it in context. And that would be my biggest criticism of the book and I'll get to more criticism of the book soon. [laughter]

Body Respect book

So now let's jump, let's move to 2014, and I teamed with Dr. Lucy Aphramor, who was also very committed to working on these issues of social justice and what we wanted to do was a book that would help people to integrate self-care into social justice. And we wrote Body Respect which is a book that I'm much more proud of today. But here's one source of sadness for me. To this day Health at Every Size outsells Body Respect two and a half to one.

HAES movement tension: changing paradigm

So even though this [HAES] book is now, well the second edition, it's now eight years old, right, this is still people's - a big way that people are getting introduced to the Health and Every Size movement - is through this behavior change frame. So the fact that we're seeing a lot of tension in our movement right now between these two different frames, the old frame that ASDAH used to endorse and you know in addition to me, and this newer frame which is trying to centralize social justice, like it's an ongoing challenge in part because people are getting introduced to health it every size [the book]. Now one thing

you might have noticed in your little promo bags is you actually got a bookmark promoting Health at Every Size and that's actually, this is the first time that I've done that in a few years. For the last few years I actually was dipping down pretty deeply into shame about health and every size [the book] and I didn't want anybody to be reading it because of the kind of damage that I thought it was doing.

And I'm still quite conflicted about it, but I've - the change and the reason that I decided that it's okay that people are reading the book right now is because I've also heard stories from so many of you about how the book has changed your life. And I know that and you know people are, my friends are trying to convince me that, you know, just look at it as a gateway book. [laughter] It brings people into the movement and then you get to ASDAH and you get exposed to a different deeper world. I'm not really sure, I'm not at peace with that yet, but I'm playing with it and just trying to own that. But I do want you to know that Body Respect better represents where I am today and where I think our movement is.

And I'm concerned, because I do know that there are a lot of people that are working out of this old privileged behavior change mode, and for my role in why that's happening. And I should say too that when you start to look at the differences between these two models, they're really quite profound. And if I were to look back at say a very influential review article that that I co-authored with Dr. Aphramor and we published in the Nutrition Journal, and all of the research studies that we cited that are showing the positive impact of health at every size, that's not the health at every size that we know. All of those studies that have been tested are the behavior change model and all - And as I'm looking at most of the books that are coming out and our health and every size movement today, it's still that behavior change model. We still have very little literature that's addressing the new place that we've come to in our movement and so we really need to build and develop it and we need to be aware of the tension and the differences so that we don't fall into that old model which is just so privileged.

Focus on Individual Change Distracts from Systemic Change

And I want to talk some more about some of the ways in which it's privileged, but let me also just very briefly just mention a different way of framing behavior change. In my book health at every size I was suggesting intuitive eating and giving people strategies to adopt it. But in a model where social justice is the starting point, instead of making that assumption that intuitive eating is valuable for everybody, because that's not a good assumption, it doesn't work for everybody. We start from asking, finding out the conditions of an individual's life and then we work backwards to try to figure out what kinds of self care can be incorporated into their life. So, for example, if you have a restaurant worker that's working two jobs and has a family to come home to and no time and all she gets is these breaks during work where there's fast food available and she's allowed to eat as much as she wants then but can't take any food home. Eating large quantities of food when she has that opportunity is healthy nutritious strategy for her. [applause] Telling her to eat all right telling her to eat intuitively is just going to put more guilt onto her, a feeling of failure, and it's going to worsen health outcomes.

So it's a very different model. We can use some of the same strategies but we have a very different starting place. It's parallel to what we see in becoming trauma-informed. You know how people used to ask the question "what's wrong with me" and instead we helped people to reframe it to say "what's happened to me." And we have to do something similar in our health and every size movement to try to figure out the context for personal behavior change and self-care.

My Eating Disorder

Okay that that's my signal to try to transition to another step [referring to the slide], okay so another criticism I have about my first book, health at every size, is that there's a story I told about my own eating disorder in that book I didn't even realize till recently that it wasn't even my story, that I was so caught up in the dominant narrative that I didn't really understand what happened for me in my eating disorder, why my healing was so long and convoluted because I bought into this idea of a singular narrative about what an eating disorder looks like.

And so that's another criticism that I have about that book and I'm going to get into more depth by now helping you to get to see me just a little bit better today. So to do that, here's a picture of me at my Bat Mitzvah. A Bat Mitzvah is a coming-of-age ritual for Jewish girls at age 13 and it's a sign that you're becoming a woman on that day. And there I am flanked by mom and dad and one thing you could probably see in that picture is they're beaming. They are so proud of me.

And what I remember most from my Bat Mitzvah was the sermon that my father gave and it was the first time that he told me how they came to name me Linda. Linda means beautiful. He was co-opting the word from another cultural tradition, not ours, cultural appropriation is the appropriate term for that [laughter], but he was so taken by the name meaning beautiful. And the ending at the end signifies femininity and in his sermon he said that we're so proud of Linda for becoming the beautiful woman that we dreamed of when she was born and that's why we gave her the name. And what my father was saying was that he wanted the best for me and in their vision, feminine beauty is the ticket to success for a woman and so that was their frame, why the name was so meaningful for them.

Now I'm sitting there listening to this and for me all I'm all I'm feeling is pain because there's a flaw in that formula, you know, I am NOT that girl that they had envisioned and planned for and tried to protect in the world.

So to help you to understand that I'd like to tell you a little bit more about myself. So there's a picture that was not on the day but I happened to be wearing that suit when I was speaking at a conference and I had an experience at that conference which I've had a few times before, but I think it will help you to understand it. So there I was dressed like that and I need to use the restroom. And so I'm walking into the bathroom and there's a woman that's walking in next to me and she sees me and she does a double take. And the next thing she does is she looks up at the sign. It was clear to me what she was doing. She wanted to confirm that in fact she was walking into the woman's room because she wasn't sure that I should be going in there. As she's doing this I'm looking at it and then she looks back at me to check again, to see, did I make a mistake? Is she really a woman? And then she noticed that I've been watching all of this.

So the next thing that happens is there's this stumbling apology, right, because there's a lot of shame in that to misgender somebody, right, that girls are supposed to look like girls and if you think someone who is a girl looks like a boy, then that's bad to do that to somebody. Now I have to admit it was a pretty painful experience for me. But not in the way you expected. When she did her double take, it felt good to me. I liked it. Because I never feel right going into a woman's room. I just don't relate to that term. And in that moment she saw me. I appreciated it. The pain for me came in the apology because what it was saying is there is supposed to be shame in that.

I prefer restroom signs like this. [laughter - Sign has pic of a genderless being, says "Whatever. Please wash your hands.] I mean really, do we have to gender somebody before giving them access to a bathroom. It's really unnecessary. [Applause] The term that I use to apply to myself is the term genderqueer, not a woman. Other people use the term non-binary. That's fine for me too. There's an umbrella term that people also use - trans - and I accept that term too, but I also know that some people use the term trans more specifically for people who stay on the binary. But anyway, most people are now using it as a more inclusive term so I'll accept that one as well.

Now, if you're experiencing a little bit of resistance, if you look up here and you're seeing a woman, believe me, I understand that. For decades I did too. I looked in a mirror and I tried really really hard to - all I could see was women and I couldn't really make sense of that world. So if that's what you see, don't worry. Hopefully there will be shifts happening and you'll be able to see something different at some point. But I want you to know that I respect it if there's resistance here because it took me decades to get to this place where I didn't see a woman and I accepted something other.

So let me give you an example of some of the things that I've been through. The resistance I faced for a really long time was where I ended up through second wave feminism, this whole idea that gender is just a social construct and so there's room for any gender within the sex woman. And so I just tried to accept the fact that I don't have to conform to those ideas of femininity, that there's room for me and I'm still a woman. And for a really really long time I was there.

I've also looked at that whole idea of maybe it is that I feel inadequate as a woman, because certainly that was true. I never felt like I measured up as a woman. There's that idea that "but your body is a woman's body." And to bring you up to the year 2018, we're recognizing women's bodies can have vaginas, women's bodies can have breasts, women's bodies don't have to have breasts, women's bodies can have penises too. There's a change in how we're understanding this. [Applause]

I've looked at whether it is that I want access to male privilege, whether it is that I'm just attention-seeking, and what I keep coming up with is no no no no. None of that's true. There is some kind of a felt sense that I have that says that I'm genderqueer, that I'm not on the binary, that I'm not a woman.

Cultural Humility

I want to say again that I totally understand if you're having trouble with that, and if you are, what I want you to do is to consider this idea of entitlement. Many of you in the room are cisgender. Not all of you, but many of you are. And that's the dominant world view is being cisgender. And when you're cisgender, because what gets reflected back to you so much is who you are, it can be really difficult to understand that not everybody else holds your perspective. You may never be able to understand my perspective but what I'm asking you to do is to trust that it's valid. I'm really glad Gloria Lucas made the exact same point a little while ago, and I think all marginalized people want people in their dominant identities to understand this about us, that you're never really going to be able to understand someone else's perspective, but that's okay, trust them to know their experience and that it's valid. So I think the cornerstone of our movement should be this cultural humility and being able to just be open to other people's experience.

I have to start talking faster or something. That clock is right unfortunately. Okay, so let me get back to that whole idea about what I wrote in the Health at Every Size book was trying to apply the dominant

perspective of eating disorders to myself. So let's get back to that fateful day of my eating disorder. Well you know, what actually, let me go back three months before to preparation for my eating disorder.

Okay, so I'm home alone. It's a Saturday morning. The reason I'm home alone is because my mother is out shopping with my father and brother for the suits that they're going to be wearing to my Bat Mitzvah and once they bought the suits for my father and brother they're going to come home, she's going to pick me up and then we have to go out dress shopping.

And I am dreading this. I always dread this. For me, wearing a dress is doing drag. [Laughter] And most of the time I was able to, growing up I dress in my brother's hand-me-downs which felt comfortable. I dreaded the shopping trips where my mom would buy the clothes that she deemed to be the girl clothes I was supposed to be wearing.

But anyway, they're out shopping and I'm home alone and just not looking forward to what's going to happen. And I'm remembering being at my brother's Bar Mitzvah three years prior and how much I loved the suit that he wore to his Bar Mitzvah. And I'm imagining what it would be like to have a suit and to be wearing it at my Bat Mitzvah. And I went into my brother's bedroom and I actually found that the suit was still sitting in his closet. And I decide to just play a little, to fantasize, and I try on the suit. And there I am adjusting the tie in the mirror, just feeling so good inhabiting my masculinity, and all of a sudden the door opens and my mom walks in. And my mom is just aghast. She is so angry with me and what she screams is "you're going to be a woman now. No more of playing those boy games."

And for me that marked a real clear division, that the stuff that I was doing just being myself, that that wasn't going to be tolerated anymore. In order to survive in my family I had to adopt this inauthentic self and be this girl to get through the family life. Of course I was also getting that message culturally. You get a lot more approval, it's a lot easier when you fit in with cultural norms. You avoid the bullying and the death if you have other marginalization on top of that, because we certainly know about the high rates of murder of trans women. So my mom made the statement loud and clear that who you are is shameful, adopt an inauthentic self and you'll be able to get by. So if a day could start my eating disorder, that would have been it.

So I then went through a period for a long time struggling with an eating disorder and I just chose three pictures to show you me at different points along it. One thing you could probably see in that is the yo-yoing weight that is pretty typical when people start dieting. And if I could also blow up that last picture, the reason I wanted to blow up that last picture is I was hoping you could get a better look at my pupils and see how big and black they are. I can't tell you the massive amounts of cocaine it took to try on that bridesmaid outfit and make it through my brother's wedding. But you know that's what it took to wear those clothes and to get my hair made up by the beauticians and you know do everything else to get through that evening. The only good thing I have to say about that evening is that I bottomed out and you know fortunately I can blame [the lack of] time on the fact that I don't have to tell that shameful story, but what I can say is it's the last time I ever wore a dress and almost the last time I did cocaine. But certainly it was the transition time for me for overcoming things.

But we all know that classic eating disorders story and this is the idea that I used to believe about myself, that we know that for a woman if you're thinner it's considered more attractive and so that's how you get access to power in our world. And that's the story that I believed about myself. And it is true that thinness would have helped me to pass better as a woman. But for me the real issue that was going on,

and so remember we're talking age thirteen or so when things are beginning. What else is happening at around that age? Puberty.

There we go, right? And so now what was happening was people were gendering me, that my body was changing in a way that everybody was seeing girl and it changed how they were treating me and I would look down at this body that didn't quite feel like me. So really what my eating disorder was about was that conflict of how my changing body was not lined up with the gender identity that I felt and it was also tied up in this way of people seeing me that didn't match who how I saw myself and wanted to be seen. So as I just said, my fear of fat was less because it denied me the femininity to pass as a woman but rather because it denied me the masculinity to be seen as my authentically gendered self.

And I think that this is important to recognize that yes, I can move towards more body appreciation which I learned to do over time, but that is never going to change the fact that other people have a lot of perceptions about my body. And this idea is something that probably most people in this room or everybody in this room is familiar with, that everybody's got ideas about who you are based on your body, whether it's because of your skin color, because of your age, because of your weight, etc, your ability status, all of those things factor into your opportunities in the world and how people treat you.

So I've learned over the years plenty of ways to find my comfort zone in this. I've learned that I can make the choices about the cultural signifiers that are under my control so I can choose things like whether or not I want to do body modification, I can choose haircuts, the clothes I wear. And I also can accept the fact that not everybody is going to see me for who I am. I create those safe spaces where I am seen and valued, this is one of them. It's wonderful to be in community and to feel seen.

I assert myself and I educate elsewhere. And I should say that this is an optional step that I don't want everybody to feel a responsibility to take on in your marginalized identities, that it's okay to sit back and not feel like you have to be the one responsible. I would rather see it be the responsibility of privileged people to take on their privilege and figure out what they can be doing to create the space rather than making it - and what they can do to learn about marginalized communities and how to make this a safe and inclusive space, rather than making it the responsibility of people in marginalized bodies to make the change. [applause]

And as sad as it is, we all have to continue to always build our skills and resilience to manage the fact that this isn't a just world and we don't get treated fairly and with respect.

So now what I want to do is shift to some of the learning lessons that I think are really important to apply to our movement as a whole. And this is the tentative title of the next book that I'm working on, I'm really excited about: "when self-love isn't enough: cultivating body liberation in unjust world." And as I'm making a transition to this next section of the talk it's just a reminder me too me too that I want to just give a call out to somebody in the room that's very special to me that's helped me and a lot of the framing of this. Kelly Diels, thank you for what you've done and for your participation in this. [applause] And for those of you who don't know who Kelly is, Kelly's I'm someone who I've recently learned, she's not just been working with me, but works behind the scenes for many of us health at every size advocates because her brilliance in this world is feminist marketing and teaching how to help people to frame their message so that it can get heard. I think her tagline is something like feminist marketing for culture makers and thank you Kelly for your support in getting to this place.

So anyway, unfortunately I have only 15 minutes left, so let me just get right back on here to some of the little learning nuggets. Some of these I'm going to whip through and I'm fortunate to be able to whip through them because they overlap with so many of the fantastic talks that we've heard already. And I appreciate that so many people have talked about concepts like cultural humility which I introduced earlier, about how this needs to be the bedrock of our movement is developing that cultural humility. So I'm not going to go into it further since you know we've already had some introduction to that.

And the need also for all of us to be accountable because not doing this work means that we're reinforcing the status quo. We have to step back, we have to do this work to unlearn a lot of things that we have unknowingly absorbed. So a next point that I really want to summarize that's really important is we are always going to have times where we want to blame it on our bodies or other people's because they seem to be the stumbling blocks to getting what it is that we want in the world. And every time you want to blame it on your body or somebody else's body, reframe it: "the problem is not in your body, the problem is in the culture of systemic injustice." [applause]

You all get that intellectually but you need to remind yourself of it all the time because we keep getting in the space of blaming it on bodies. It's hard not to when we get so much reinforcement from the outside world that our bodies are the problem, so it can be hard to keep this in mind but try, ok? And let's support one another and our clients in remembering the problem is in a system of injustice not in our bodies.

Center Marginalized Experience

Next this idea of centralizing marginalized experience, And I want to talk about this just a little bit more because I think that's a value for everybody, particularly for the people who have more dominant and privileged identities, they, everybody is going to be benefit when we stop centering dominant experience but instead learn more and centralize marginalized experience.

And let me just give you an example of this. Every single one of you is oppressed by gender stereotypes. I mean think about - I teach classes, you know, or I used to teach classes in in gender. And my students would always - I live in progressive San Francisco where people kind of claim that it's a post-feminist world that they're living in - but they don't quite get it. But they thought that they're not really interjecting gender into what they do, that they're making conscious choices about who they are, not realizing what gendered beings this culture makes us. But by the end of the course everybody could pass the final paper where they had to in a day come up with 100 experiences that they had that were gendered experiences. Whereas they started out thinking it was zero, but just think about it this morning, I mean probably you put deodorant on and did you really need to buy deodorant that's specific for a woman or a man? Right? There's nothing different in the formulas, it's about scents. There's some weird idea that women are supposed to prefer floral scents and you know there's something more rugged about men, right? And there's no of consideration of course for people who might not fit into those binary categories, right?

But we're forced to gender ourselves all the time. And this is limiting for all of us. We don't get a chance to explore the full realm of possibility of who we can become and which of those gender traits feels right to us and which might be limiting to us and we might want to change. So when we get confronted with people who are off the binary we realize that there's more than two options for expression and it can

free us to find ourselves better. So that's one example of how when we learn about people who have experiences different from ours it opens our worlds in ways that are just unimaginable otherwise.

And another point there is that if you see me as a woman - here's another example – okay, this is fresh. It actually happened Friday night here at the conference. I'm sitting talking to a few people and another person walks up and joins our conversation and the first thing she says when she joins the conversation is “hello ladies.” And you know I'm sitting there and to me that's like getting kicked in the gut because it's just such a statement that I'm not seen right now And I'm thinking about what I want to do and the truth is, I'm tired of talking about gender. There's so much about me that is so much more interesting to talk about – [applause] - that I just didn't want to go there. We were having such an interesting conversation so I just let it slide. And it was just, I just felt it like this is just another one of those microaggressions and whatever, okay.

But yesterday this woman came up to me and said “you know I want to apologize for referring to you as a lady. I wasn't seeing you and someone in the group later brought it to my attention and corrected me and helped me to understand what that might have felt like to you and I want to apologize.” That was where she left it, right. And so the final thing was, see before she had apologized she wouldn't have access to my world because I just shut her down. I wasn't interested in talking to someone who wasn't going to see me. But now all of a sudden it's like she's seeing me and accepting me and now we can be friends and it developed into a much longer conversation. So before that little step of cultural humility, her world was very narrow. There weren't going to be a whole lot of people that weren't like her that she could get to know, but by exhibiting that cultural humility, it allowed her access to my world.

So it's really critical for people with dominant identities to recognize that this isn't about helping others. This is what's going to expand everybody's world.

Body Autonomy

Okay, I have to really be careful too, we have six minutes left. Okay, next point I want to make is about body autonomy. And I want to say that the body respect movement that's been happening - or the body positive movement that's been happening – has been really damaging to me [applause] and it was part of my eating disorder. And I think we need to start changing all the memes. Like think about one meme that is a really difficult one for trans people, the idea of “change the culture, don't change your body.” For some people changing their body is going to be an important part of finding their wholeness in the world and so what we have to do is we have to learn to instead expand our view to support everybody in developing body autonomy, that means ownership of their own body and how they want to take care of their body. [applause]

Another point that I've taught an entire academic three-credit course on this topic and now I have to do it in two minutes or less, right, but at just how important at all it is for all of us to develop our skills to live in a world that doesn't treat us so well. And I don't have time to go into those resilience strategies but I want to just support you in exploring what self-care might look like to you and how you do that process.

Resilience and Resistance

And I also want to suggest too that I spent an awful lot of time when I was first teaching social justice railing against oppression and how hard it is and classes with me were I think were quite depressing, you know, thinking in depth about all of this. But what I also want to say is that that's not my story. My story

is a story of resilience and resistance and strength. That yes, I've experienced some adversity but that adversity has made me a stronger better person. One of the reasons I can do this kind of work is because of the empathy that I've developed as a result of all the crap that I've experienced in my life. There's a lot of ways that the person I became is a result of the trauma and the pain that I've experienced. And so let's also remember too that our stories of trauma and pain are, there's power in that, that we are better stronger people for what we're experiencing and part of the reason we are the awesome amazing people we are is because of that history. And let's keep remembering that and remembering that marginalized people have always found ways to survive. We found ways to resist and we've built culture from it, the culture of resistance which is beautiful and that to me is where it's all about.

The Stress – Disease Connection

Whoops [referring to slide]. I'm going to skip this for a second and come back to that. That to me is where it is all about is that I don't think there's an answer to these individual - there aren't individual solutions to all of these problems that we're facing, whether it's about the anxiety you experience, the depression, the diabetes or the irritable bowel syndrome, right? All of those things are about a body's response to difficult circumstances. And with all of them we could trace a stress response that goes on in the body physiologically that will cause you to either automatically shut down like some people do through depression or that might cause your gut to spasm and that results in the irritable bowel syndrome or has some effect on fuel utilization and turns into diabetes. All of these things, it's part of the fact that we're not given permission to fully express ourselves and be in our bodies.

Connection: We Need It

And as humans we all want to be included. We want connection. And it's that failure of connection that is the real problem. And so the solution is not this end goal, the solution is right here. It's in the resistance, it's the shared struggle that we all go through, it's recognizing that we're all vulnerable people in this world that doesn't want to see us. And that we can be a sanctuary for one another. And this is what we can provide for our friends, for our clients, is that place where everybody could be seen and heard and valued for who they are. And that to me is the total privilege of what we're creating here. And I'm just so awed to be in the presence of people that are part of this with me. And I want to end on that because that's the kind of thing that gets you all up into standing ovations [laughter], but I can't, no, I have one minute on the clock left. [laughter]

Linda? Lindo?

And there was something really important and you know but that, that shared community, we'll come back to that. But I realized that I haven't really properly introduced myself to you today and that's that I told you why I got the name Linda in the first place. Well, I get what was behind my parents' goal in that they wanted me to be happy and loved and appreciated and valued for who I am. And over the years I've found that that's not Linda. And a friend of mine, this is his cultural tradition, his native language - when he was speaking to me, he said "you know you've never been a Linda, you've always been a Lindo to me." And Linda was the masculinized ending of that. And he explained to me that in his tradition when you use Lindo you're talking about more of an essence of beauty as opposed to the physical beauty, that Linda connotes, which to me was just a gorgeous statement. And I just felt so privileged and it felt so good and right to me. I then tried it on and I've just asked my friends and family to call me Lindo and more and more it just feels like this is right, this is me.

So I invite you to call me Lindo. I am looking forward to making a public shift, that hasn't happened yet. It will happen with the publication of my next book. So in the meantime I also ask that you respect the fact it's a little bit challenging being a public figure and I would like to control the narrative a little bit about some of the public disclosure that I'm going to be making in the future. So for now if you're doing any blogging or anything I'd probably be a little bit more comfortable if you refer to me as Linda and maybe not use the word trans. But not to worry, I'm not closeted. There's going to be some public exposure but I'm just not ready. I need to kind of prepare myself for this and to try to direct the narrative a little bit, so we'll see those shifts over time, but certainly here in my community of all you amazing people I want to be seen. And so please, Lindo here. And thank you. This - you are just amazing and I'm really honored to be part of this. . [standing ovation]

I'm going to cry. I think that's enough. Thank you, thank you.

[Audience member] We love you, Lindo Bacon. [laughter]