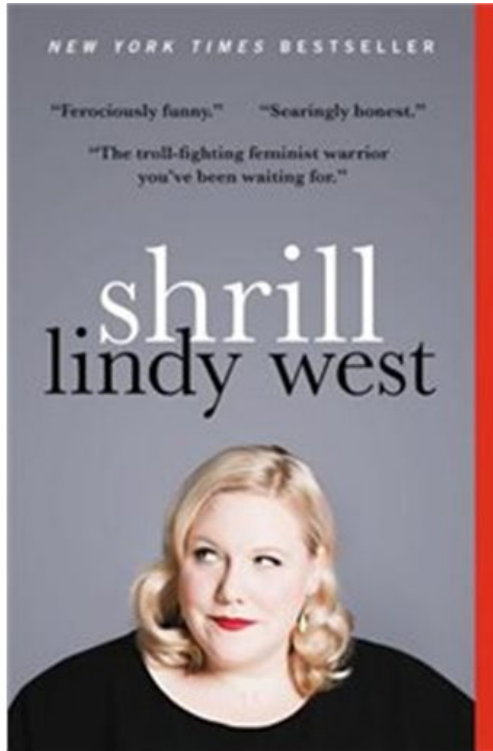


Shrill

I recently read a book that I had too much to say about to just include it in my usual book posts. This one deserved it's own post.

I first heard about the book, [Shrill by Lindy West](#), on a podcast: [This American Life #589: Tell Me I'm Fat](#). It was really interesting, sometimes sad and disappointing, but it was an excellent podcast that I recommend highly! And it lead to me checking out "Shrill" at the library.



I read it in a few days. It took me a little longer than usual to read because I wanted to take my time. I could relate to so much of the book, it was sometimes hard and painful to read. So many of her stories were MY stories.

The book is a sort of memoir, but not really, and she touches on a lot of topics. She of course talks about being fat, but she also talks a lot about feminism and current events. She touches, briefly, in the beginning of the book about the election and Hillary Clinton. It's funny--during the election stuff last year I heard that word a LOT when people (usually men) talked about Hillary. She was "shrill". It was kind of grating. I couldn't put my finger on why, exactly, but Lindy explained it pretty well:

"To be shrill is to reach above your station; to abandon your duty to soothe and please; in short, to be heard. I know from experience that shrill bitches get punished. I did not anticipate that millions of Americans would be so repulsed by the hubris of female ambition that they would elect a self-professed sexual predator with zero qualifications and fewer scruples. But I should have anticipated it. They'd been warning me for years. [pg v]"

"Trump was a Twitter troll himself, and he promised to 'Make America Great Again,' that is, drag us back a half century to a time when black men didn't tell white men what to do and girls kept their mouths shut about rape...Internet trolls were a symptom of the slow death and rising panic of male privilege--one last, snarling grasp at power by white men who could feel diversity winning and their supremacy waning. [pg v]"

Hillary being labeled as SHRILL was putting her in her place. Reminding her and everyone interested in voting for her, that she was less than because she was a woman. (Sometimes she got a little preachy in the book, but it wasn't overt or obnoxious.)

If you're burned out on politics (like me), don't worry, the book isn't about that. She goes on to talk about how she's treated as an obese woman.

"Fat people are helpless babies enslaved to their most capricious cravings. [pg 14]"

"Please don't forget; I am my body. When my body gets smaller, it is still me. When my body gets bigger, it is still me. There is not a thin woman inside of me, awaiting excavation. [pg 15]"

It was funny how she described her love of accessories:

"I insisted that shoes and accessories were just 'my thing,' because my friends didn't realize I couldn't shop for clothes at a regular store and I was too mortified to explain it to them. I backed out of dinner plans if I remembered the restaurant had particularly narrow aisles or rickety chairs. [pg 16]"

I could totally relate to that. I didn't have great (or nice) plus sized clothes when I was fat. But I bought a lot of jewelry, I did my nails every week --these were things I could control to look "nice" and not fret about how the sizes didn't fit.

She then told a story that I could totally relate to. She was at an event for work and went to the outdoor food area for lunch. She was sitting on a picnic bench to eat her lunch and moved in a certain way and tipped everything over:

"I fell in the dirt. The pizza fell on top of me. The Diet Pepsi tipped over and glogged out all over my dress. The table fell on top of the Pepsi on top of the pizza on top of me. The napkin fluttered away. EVERYONE LOOKED AT ME. The music journalists looked at me. The band Yacht looked at me. In an attempt at damage control, I yelled, 'I'm really drunk, so it's ok!' which wasn't even true, but apparently it's better to be a drunk at ten in the morning than it is to be a human being who weighs something? All that anxiety about trying not to be a gross, gluttonous fat lady eating a 'bad' food in public, and I wound up being the fat lady who was so excited about pizza that she threw herself to the ground and rolled around in it like a dog with a raccoon carcass. Nailed it. [pg 46]"

I have a similar story. Well, several. There were many times when I was 250 pounds and I would never ever sit on a picnic bench. Why? Because of the fear and anxiety of tipping it over. Even if there were people on the other side of the bench--you never knew. And I never stood up too quickly or sat down too quickly just in case I tipped it over with my weight--with people sitting on it!

My other story was at my family reunion many years ago. It was dinner time and I'd filled my plate (reasonably, not heaping or anything) and with my cousin Anna sat down on the porch swing to eat dinner. Except the porch swing was old, probably loose, and the weight caused it to crash and we both fell. It was humiliating and my first thought was "everyone is staring because I'm the fat chick who broke the swing". It was probably one of the most humiliating experiences as a plus sized girl I had.



She talked about bad relationships. She had a lot of relationships where she settled (so did I back in the day) where she put up with shit because she was fat.

"Despite having nearly nothing in common (his top interests included cross-country running, fantasy cross-country running [he invented it], New England the place, New England the idea, and going outside on Saint Patrick's Day; mine were candy, naps, hugging, and wizards), we spent a staggering amount of time together. [pg53]"

"...reverse body dysmorphia: When I looked in the mirror, I could never understand what was supposedly so disgusting. I knew I

was smart, funny, talented, social, kind---why wasn't that enough? By all the metrics I cared about, I was a home run. [pg 68]"

"Lots of men wanted to have sex with me--I dated casually, I got texts in the night--they just didn't want to go to a restaurant with me, or bring me to their office party, or open Christmas presents with me. [pg 73]"

Ugh. Dating and navigating that stuff when you are overweight or obese is brutal. You never know if it's because of your size...or something else...and it's easy to fat-shame yourself.

One of the good things about this book is that Lindy is really funny. She writes well and is pretty hilarious, witty and biting in her comments and writing style. It added levity to some of the heavy topics. (And I kind of wish she had addressed that because I know a lot of fat men and women who use comedy as a shield--and that's kind of a "thing" too.)

"As a woman, my body is scrutinized, policed, and treated as a public commodity. As a fat woman, my body is also lampooned, openly reviled, and associated with moral and intellectual failure. My body limits my job prospects, access to medical care and fair trials. [pg 67]"

"I hate being fat. I hate the way people look at me, or don't. I hate being a joke...I hate the disorientating limbo between too visible and invisible. [pg 77]"

Ok, that was super hard for me to read. It brought up a lot of ghosts and feelings from when I was obese. The feeling of being invisible. I felt that way for so long and then when I started to lose weight I got a ton of attention and it was very weird for me to suddenly be SEEN. I'd get encouragement from people everywhere--people, sometimes people I barely knew--watched me lose weight and congratulated me, told me how amazing I looked, etc. That positive feedback was very motivating and helped me.

Then...the positive feedback ended. I lost the weight, the "newness" of it wore off and I maintained my 110 pound weight loss for almost 10 years. I rarely got comments about my body or how I looked. Sometimes that was hard because the positive comments were a nice self-esteem booster.

Then...something else happened. I got pregnant. I got tons of positive feedback and well-wishes from people because people are always so excited about pregnancy and babies. Except...afterward? The mom kind of disappears. I was back to being invisible, but for different reasons and that was very weird (and hard) for me.



Anyways, back to the book. I thought this passage was particular relateable:

"Like most fat people who've been lectured about diet and exercise since childhood, I actually know an inordinate amount about nutrition and fitness. The number of nutrition classes and hospital-sponsored weight loss programs and individual dietitian consultations and tear-filled therapy sessions I've poured money into over the years makes me grind my teeth...I can rattle off how many calories are in a banana or an egg or six almonds or a Lean Cuisine Santa Fe Style Rice and Beans. I know the difference between spelt bread and Ezekiel bread, and I know that lemon juice makes a great 'sauce'! I could teach you the proper form for

squats and lunges and kettle bell swings, if you want. I can diagnose your shin splints.

"The level of restriction that I was told, by professionals, was necessary for me to 'fix' my body essentially precluded any semblance of joyous, fulfilling human life. It was about learning to live with hunger--with feeling 'light'. [pg 74]"

I can relate to all of that. After over a decade of counting calories and restricting and losing weight, keeping it off, trying to eat in moderation, I can spout out the calories in almost anything without having to look it up. All of that becomes part of your regular thinking, which can be both good and bad.

Lindy shared a horrible story about flying and having a really bad experience with the guy sitting next to her on the plane. Here are a few excerpts from that:

"One time, I flew first class on an airplane, because when I checked in they offered me a fifty-dollar upgrade, and when you are a fat person with fifty dollars and someday offers you a 21-inch recliner instead of a 17-inch trash compacter, you say YES. [pg 134]"

"This is the subtext of my life: 'You're bigger than I'd like you to be.' 'I dread being near you.' 'Your body itself is a breach of etiquette.' 'You are clearly a fucking food who thinks that cheesecake is a vegetable.' Nobody wants to sit next to a fat person on a plane. Don't think we don't know. [pg 141]"

"The dude next to me didn't call me fat to my face. I don't even know if that's what was bothering him, although I recognized the way he looked at my body (my body, not my face, not once, not ever). [pg 142]"

Reading her story and how that guy talked to her and treated her made my blood boil--because I had also had similar experiences flying, or taking public transportation, or pretty much doing anything out in the world as a fat girl.

The book wasn't all negative, though. She did find the love of her life and shared their happy story. This quote stuck out for me:

"One time when you were drunk you told me, 'If you ever propose to me, don't do it in the bullshit way that dudes usually treat fat girls. Like it's a secret, or you're just trying to keep me from leaving you. Thin girls get public proposals, like those dudes are winning a fucking prize. Fat chicks deserve that, too.' [pg 238]"

How true is that statement?? I fucking loved it. YES. How many times are fat girls treated differently? ALL THE TIME. Her public proposal was awesome and brought tears to my eyes. Her man did it right! He remembered, even if she hadn't remembered making that statement!



The book was really good and worth a read. It is definitely hard to read some of it. Some of it touched a little too close to home for me, and brought up some not so great memories and feelings, but at the same time it was kinda cool to read about someone else experiencing things in a similar way as me.

I hope you check it out!