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Basketball, Barkley and Fat Bashing

by Abby Lentz, founder of HeavyWeight Yoga

I felt like I was back in junior high again, taking a logic test — “Which of these 3 things does not belong?” For some, fat bashing by Charles Barkley on national television during the NBA Playoffs was actually a winning combination of “None of the above.” After all, only people without a sense of humor wouldn’t enjoy his childish joke aimed at the “fat women” of San Antonio and their “big bloomers” during a nationally broadcasted basketball analysis television show.

I didn’t wake up that morning in May thinking, “Today I’ll become an activist.” Throughout the last nine years, I made it a point to remain completely neutral about all things, especially on social media where everyone seems to have an opinion about everything. And, in fact, I stopped watching Barkley’s show years ago when I found I just didn’t have the stomach for his brand of humor. I turned him off, but I didn’t stand up to him. However, when a San Antonio sports writer made mention of Barkley’s comments, I had to see what it was all about.

In 2004, I founded HeavyWeight Yoga for people who would never feel comfortable or welcomed into a traditional yoga class. I based my program on the 3 A’s:

- Awareness
- Acceptance
- and Affection

It was always important to me that weight-loss was never a topic of discussion. At more than 220 pounds, I just wanted to extend the benefits of yoga to everyone, with the things I had learned throughout 42 years of practicing it. After all, during those decades, I had been



many different sizes, starting from being a new mother to becoming a content grandmother who stopped thinking about her body image long ago.

I always felt that yoga is a neutral tool, one whose main message is about finding a path to loving yourself regardless of size or affiliation. I was as comfortable being at the OAC’s Inaugural *Your Weight Matters* National Convention in Dallas, as when I served as the yoga moderator for the Health at Every Size (HAES) Fit Fatties Yoga Group, or presented at ObesityHelp. I came to realize that as polarized as groups may appear to be, they all agree that self-love should be promoted and fat bashing should be eliminated.

In 2012, after turning the other cheek for two years, the then-mayor of San Antonio Julian Castro stood up to Barkley on YouTube with humor. Nothing changed. Barkley even won back-to-back Emmys for Best Sports Commentary in 2012 and 2013 and got signed to a big contract with a weight-loss company. Although poking fun of

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public figures for their weight has a long history, that never made (or makes) it right. At least public figures have a forum to reply, a place to push back — to stand up. But what do you do if you're a woman in San Antonio watching a game with your husband, son, brother, or dad, cheering for the home team together? Or harder still, watching with your daughter or granddaughter.

The fact is discrimination of any kind hurts us all. Weight bias seems to be the last acceptable form of discrimination in America. In fact, when Barkley bashes the “fat” women of San Antonio, he’s actually bashing all the women of San Antonio, regardless of their weight. He’s bashing the mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters of the men of San Antonio. When he bashes all the women of San Antonio and by extension, all the men who love them, Barkley is actually bashing us all.

Separating any group from the rest of us is based on a common strategy as old as the beginning of time — so basic even wolves do it instinctively in the wild.

Cull out the weak from the herd and you’ll be in for an easy kill — or laugh. Not all that long ago, Hitler did it to the Jews. Racists did it to the blacks. Feminists and gays all cut out from the general population, often with the scalpel named “comedy.”



Abby and her husband Ron pose for a picture at a San Antonio Spurs game.

When on the top of his game, Barkley is an excellent analyst, sharing insights with more than flashes of brilliance. Forget that while he’s making fun of the women of San Antonio, he wasn’t delivering any of this expert analysis he’s actually paid for. Forget that his only advice if you don’t have “a sense of humor,” is to turn off your television. For more than four years, to Barkley, to the producers of this show, and to a wide range of sponsors, his fat bashing didn’t matter.

That is, until the OAC turned up the heat with their “Bias Busters.”

Not able to be everywhere, the OAC relies on its membership to alert them of weight discrimination. Their Stigma section talks directly to the pain and heartbreak brought on by this type of prejudice. While finally I pushed back as an individual with Facebook, Twitter, and even a MoveOn petition that generated 150 signatures, it was a good start — but not enough. My contacting the OAC turned the tide. Putting their professional expertise to work they got noticed by national media — TMZ Sports, 247Sports and the Washington Examiner, just to mention a few.

While Barkley responded to the national pressure for him to apologize that it would only happen when “hell freezes over,” so far this basketball season he seems to be content just talking about basketball and his new eyewear.

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MAKE A DIFFERENCE!





ABOUT THE OBESITY ACTION COALITION (OAC)

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is a National non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by obesity and helping them along their journey toward better health. Our core focuses are to elevate the conversation of weight and its impact on health, improve access to obesity care, provide science-based education on obesity and its treatments, and fight to eliminate weight bias and discrimination.



VIBRANT COMMUNITY



NATIONAL AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS



ANNUAL CONVENTION



ADVOCACY



PUBLIC EDUCATION

LEARN, CONNECT, ENGAGE

The OAC knows that the journey with weight can be challenging but we also know that great things happen when we learn, connect and engage. That is why the OAC Community exists. Our Community is designed to provide quality education, ongoing support programs, an opportunity to connect, and a place to take action on important issues.

Through the OAC Community, you can get access to:

- Weight & Health Education • Community Blogs
 - Community Discussion Forum
 - Ongoing Support • Meaningful Connections
- AND MUCH MORE**



JOIN TODAY: GO TO [OBESITYACTION.ORG/JOIN](https://obesityaction.org/join)

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