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Celebrity confessions a positive sign for women struggling with weight issues



Lady Gaga Credit: Lady Gaga in Paris, Sept. 23, 2012. (Getty)

By **SHEILA ANNE FEENEY**

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Maybe celebrities really ARE just like us.

In the past month, a stunning array of stars have come out about their body issues and stood up to the tyranny of unrealistic public expectations.

After snarky comments were lobbed at Lady Gaga for gaining weight, she shared candid, unglamorous pics with captions explaining she had seesawed between anorexia and bulimia since adolescence and now supported a "body revolution" to "breed some . . . compassion."

Katie Couric, while interviewing Demi Lovato about her cutting and eating disorders, fessed up that she had "wrestled with bulimia all through college and for two years after that."

When Wisconsin newscaster Jennifer Livingston received a letter from a viewer criticizing her weight, she read the writer of the letter the riot act on air, and became a viral sensation.

"Any time someone talks about their experience with a secretive condition like bulimia, it allows someone else to feel like they're not the only one," and reduces isolation, said Michael Friedman, a clinical psychologist with Manhattan Behavioral Associates who treats women with eating disorders. Stars'

confessing their struggles can also inspire hope, he noted, leading people with eating disorders to think, "If they got over it, maybe I can," too, he noted.

The refusal to accept stigmatizing messages about one's weight, as Livingston did, is also a good thing, noted Friedman. Castigating people for their size, shape or weight fuels the obesity epidemic, he explained "causes people to suffer, it causes stress and depresses people," fueling binge-eating disorders.

Repudiating unsolicited criticism about one's appearance "is very much linked to the feminist movement and realizing that women's bodies sometimes carry fat, and that's OK," Friedman said.

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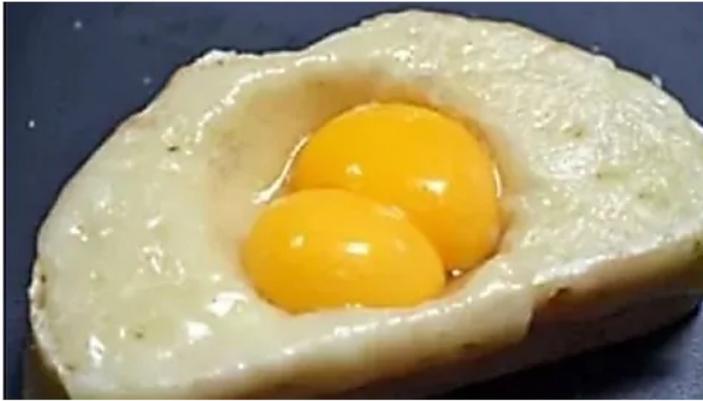
What Gaga did "was awesome," enthused Veronica Nival, 38, a paralegal from the South Bronx. When celebs speak in a positive way "about having a healthy body image, it's empowering to everyone else. We're brought up looking at all these models and celebrities, but we don't know what they had to do to look that way unless they tell us."

Confessions and mea culpas help girls and women "realize the bodies they see on TV aren't realistic bodies: People hurt themselves to get that thin," added Laura Cipullo, a registered dietitian and certified eating disorders specialist.

But celebs can also set a bad example, cautioned Cipullo. Kim Kardashian, she noted, who is vigorously plugging a product called QuickTrim, "is sending the wrong message. Diet pills are part of an eating disorder and the young girls who look up to her can damage themselves and their metabolism," by using them.

Celebrity confessions are unlikely to affect Chasity (cq) Cruz, 31, from Williamsburg, who is unconcerned about the few post-baby pounds she has been unable to pry off since delivering a son a year ago. "I don't have a personal trainer. I don't have a personal chef," said the sales clerk. Wealthy stars have options and time the average woman can only dream about, Cruz observed, and "I'm realistic."

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