Society places certain body types - namely thin - on a pedestal, deeming them more worthy and desirable while stigmatizing larger bodies. One way this bias shows up is through praising, or showing a preference for bodies, through words or actions, based on the physical trait of thinness or weight loss.

**Impact and Effects**

Thin praising permeates our society. Think about a celebrity who lost weight and the positive compliments and congratulations that ensue, or a coworker who went on a diet and received extra attention as a result.

Because of the pervasive nature of dieting and the pursuit of thinness, thin praising is ingrained in our culture and the way we interact with others. It’s predicated on the idea that thinner is better, healthier, and more beautiful. A direct result of subscribing to these beliefs is the subsequent discrimination of bodies which are not thin, which has significant consequences.

People in bigger bodies are:
- Less likely to be hired for jobs, earn as much as thinner peers, or get promoted.
- More likely to receive poor treatment from healthcare providers and educators as a result of weight stigma.2

**Concerns and Considerations**

Though you may think you are offering a compliment, it might be helpful to consider the following before praising thinness or weight loss through weight-based compliments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>It reinforces weight bias.</th>
<th>Showing a preference for thinner bodies automatically, even if inadvertently, upholds weight bias by equating non-thin bodies as less than.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It could reinforce disordered eating or other unhealthy practices and behaviors.</td>
<td>If someone is struggling with disordered eating or other unhealthy behaviors and you offer a compliment about their body, you could, unknowingly, be reinforcing those behaviors. Saying “you look great!” could translate to “keep up your unhealthy lifestyle!”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weight loss could be unintentional (e.g. sickness, stress, trauma, medication).</td>
<td>Certain illnesses or stress can cause a lack of appetite and muscle wasting which may lead to weight loss. In this case, congratulating someone on weight loss, in a way, celebrates their illness or stress. This also illustrates how thinner does not equal healthier.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drawing attention to someone’s body could make them uncomfortable or re-mind them of past trauma.1</td>
<td>Comments about bodies and appearance, despite being framed as compliments, might not be well-received by everyone. If someone experienced bodily trauma in the past, calling attention to their body could make them feel unsafe and dredge up painful memories. Even in the absence of trauma, complimenting their physique could be seen as a sexual advance or harassment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Positive Alternatives**

- Compliment someone on their ideas, strengths or personality, including what you admire or enjoy most about them.
- Emphasize that the size of one’s body does not determine their health and that caring for oneself holistically (mentally, emotionally, physically, socially) is important.
- Celebrate achievements that are not weight-oriented (e.g. school, career, activities and involvement).

**References**

1. Seven Reasons Not to Compliment Someone on Weight Loss (link to site)