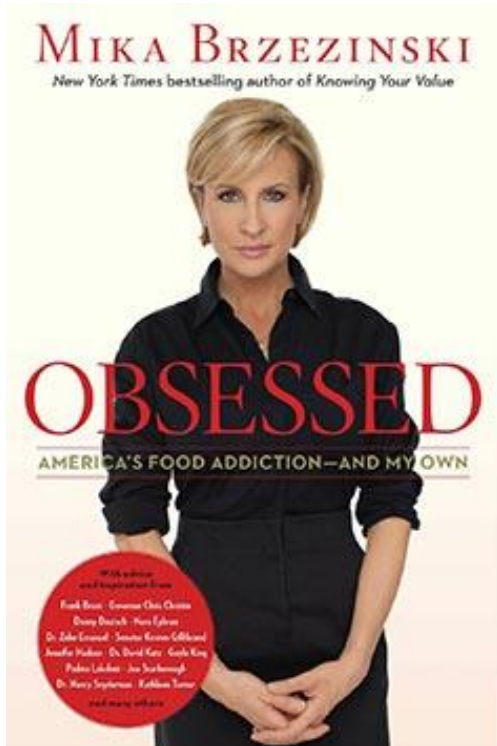


Mika Brzezinski: Why We Should Start Using the Word 'Fat'

Mika Brzezinski – May 7, 2013



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In “Obsessed,” veteran journalist and “Morning Joe” co-host Mika Brzezinski takes on America’s obesity crisis—specifically the way in which we talk about it. “Remember the days when people whispered about cancer and called it ‘the big C,’” she writes. “Now we’re doing the same thing with weight problems.” Drawing on testimonies from celebrities such as Jennifer Hudson, Nora Ephron and Chris Christie, as well as her own story of food obsession, Brzezinski puts forth the idea that the battle against America’s weight problem begins with talking candidly about it. In this exclusive essay for Bookish, she argues that when we tiptoe around socially sensitive words such as “fat,” “obese” and “overweight, we “end up skirting the whole issue.”

Fat. Obese. These are words that can sting. But, they are words that we need to use to have an honest conversation about the biggest health crisis facing our country: the epidemic of obesity among American adults and children.

I still remember the look on my friend Diane’s face when we had the conversation that started me down the path of writing “Obsessed.” We were on her boat on a beautiful Labor Day weekend with our families. Diane was worried about what to make for dinner because she had come to think of me as “the Food Police”—always so correct in my eating and not afraid to tell other people on “Morning Joe” what foods they should avoid. That day, I revealed my own

obsession with unhealthy food and my struggles to stay thin, and I knew it was time to take on the one issue that we had never talked about in our long friendship.

“Diane,” I said, “you can’t climb onto this boat without help. Is that how you want to live? Your whole body hurts and your joints are killing you. Why do you think that is? I am just going to say it. It’s because you are fat.”

At that moment Diane looked like I had punched her in the face. But, over the last year, she has lost 75 pounds. She tells me those are the kindest words I could have said to her, because they shocked her into changing her life and regaining her health.

And that’s the conversation we all need to have—in our families, in our schools, in our doctor’s offices and in our communities. I don’t know how we can have this conversation without using those words.

I think about a doctor with a patient who weighs 250 lbs., and the doctor doesn’t talk about fat. To me, that’s insane. And, it’s one of the reasons why we are in the place we are in.

We can use the word “obese,” or “overweight,” or “fat,” but we need to use the words. As of right now, we are not, and it’s amazing what avoiding those words can lead to: a country in which two thirds of adults are overweight or obese. I know those words can hurt, but we need to use them—not because we want to upset people, but because we want to explore the truth and get to a better place.

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Some of the writers who have interviewed Diane and me about the book are upset with me because I called her “fat” and am not fat myself. There is a lot that goes along with that word that we need to shed. As I write in my book, “We should talk about being fat, not to be pejorative, but because we have to tell the truth. By trying to be politically correct and socially sensitive, we end up skirting the whole issue instead.” Saying someone is fat is not a judgment—it’s a description. We need to stop blaming and shaming people who struggle with their weight, and start figuring out how to help them, and help all of us, find a healthy way to eat.

Mika Brzezinski is a co-host of “Morning Joe” and the author of the New York Times bestsellers “All Things At Once” and “Knowing Your Value.”

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