

“I’m phat with an f.”

Sick of hearing about the obesity “crisis,” **Simcha Whitehill** turns **bikini model** at a fat-acceptance conference and proudly **shows off what she’s got.**

Hey Simcha, would you model in our fashion show Friday?” Well, this was something I didn’t expect to be asked.

I mean, I’d pretended an empty school hallway was my personal runway more than a few times growing up, but *me*, a model? “Um...yes!” I finally squeaked out. “How about in a bikini?” asked the voice. Insert record scratch here.

I am 5’2” and a size 16, and I’m at a convention run by the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance, which works to protect overweight people, sort of like how the NAACP protects black people, but with a gay-pride-parade vibe. When I heard about the event, I was psyched to go and attend workshops like “Fat Poetry,” “Mega Yoga” and “Throwing Our Weight Around,” an activism primer. And seeing as how I hadn’t been on a diet in more than a

decade, most of my clothes are made with spandex, and I’m officially dating my third pizza guy (truly), I couldn’t wait to finally let my fat flag fly with more than 500 of my people. But model in a *bikini*? Crap. I’m going to have to put my big butt where my big mouth is.

“Hi, I’m Simcha, the bikini model,” I say when I arrive at the fitting.

“Oh no,” says KZ of Big Babes Beach Wear, the plus-size line providing the samples. “I don’t think we have anything that’s going to fit you.” *That* I was used to hearing. “Try this,” she says, sighing and handing me an XXL neon-orange two-piece. “It’s the smallest thing I’ve got.” Wait, I’m too *small*?

“It took me until I was 17 to figure out that I look good the way I am,” confides my fel-



Eat your heart out, Kate Moss.

low fashion show model, Julie Bates, a gorgeous blue-eyed 18-year-old. “Still, people tell me all the time, ‘Oh, you have such a pretty face, but what about your tummy?’” With backhanded compliments like that, it’s no wonder that one recent study found that as many as 75 percent of young girls who are an average size believe they’re too fat and are actively trying to lose weight.

“In the media they teach you how to look smaller instead of how to look better,” says Tiina Vuorenmaa (nope, her name’s not a typo), a stunning 29-year-old plus-size model who gives me a mini pep talk the day before the show. “Your weight shouldn’t make you wait.” So the girl has a motto, but I like the sentiment. Hanging out with these super-confident women

has me pumped.

“Cute G-string!” I say to a woman who looks hot in a 3XL gold lace thong. It’s now the day of the show and we’re standing backstage. As someone who used to wear soccer shorts and an extra-large T-shirt to go swimming, I can’t believe I’m about to work the runway in a bikini, and I’m not even sucking in my stomach.

“Simcha, you’re next!” Michelle, the show’s coordinator, says. She opens the curtain, and I’m off. Midway down the catwalk, I rip off my beach wrap, and at the end, I decide to give some extra shakes of what my mama gave me—hey, these people came to see a show. And apparently, they liked what they saw, because afterward I get compliments like, “You were great!” and “You really know how to move to the music.”

“There was music?” I ask. The clapping was so loud, I didn’t even hear it.

The whole experience has inspired me to start rocking my very own two-piece at every beach and pool this side of the Mississippi. And I plan to tell everyone I’m a bikini model.

You Say...
Fat: Okay to say or no thanks?

“Even if it’s supposedly cool to say, I don’t think anyone wants to be blatantly called fat.”
 —Nikki, 21, Mullins, S.C.

“No, I don’t think it’ll ever be the new *bitch*.”
 —Elizabeth, 22, Baton Rouge, La.