

'I Get Hateful Comments About My Size All The Time—Here's How I Rise Above'

Sarah Sapora is no stranger to trolls

As told to Kirstin Canning
Women's Health

I'm no longer shocked by the way people talk about me online. As a plus-size woman who is unashamed of her body and is committed to living happier and healthier from the inside out (and who poses in athletic gear and swimsuits with pride!), I get plenty of nasty comments—especially on Instagram. For those, I've adopted a "forgive and delete" mentality, and that serves my followers and me well. But recently, a conversation went down in my direct messages that was so disrespectful and frankly, gross, that I had to respond.

Long story short, an account used a photo of mine without permission. It's an image of me in a tiny swimsuit, posing on the beach with a traditionally attractive man. I'm not trying to cover myself or hide. It's the kind of image that a lot of people aren't used to seeing, and one that frequently gets posted on the internet without my consent. For many people, this photo has shock value. I believe that this account, which positions itself as being a health, fitness, and body-friendly account, used my image out-of-context to generate comments and clicks. And the comments under it were pretty awful. I'm no longer bothered by comments on the internet, but I didn't want a picture of me to be used in this way. So I reached out to the account to ask them to take down the image, and realized they had used another one of my photos without permission in the past as well. They were dismissive, wouldn't listen to me or complete my request, and soon, the



conversation turned straight up childish. They told me to "quit whining," and sent me a series of food emojis and "Nom nom nom." My request was reasonable and polite. And I was treated with condescending disdain. I immediately thought—how often does this happen to women in general?

If there's anything I've learned from working with women, it's that if I've experienced something, there are probably hundreds of thousands of other women who have gone through something similar. These messages were no longer about me or the other account. They're a reflection of how women are often ignored or treated like they're irrational or crazy when they make a perfectly reasonable request. I needed to share this to show other women that "It's not just you. This does happen and you're not crazy." So I posted the exchange on my Instagram, and was floored by the support and sympathy I got from my followers.

As women, we're often encouraged not to react with emotion—especially from masculine figures who are less emotional or view our emotional process as a burden. We

often have to dampen ourselves down in conversations, or train ourselves not to react, even when we are being treated unfairly. Whenever a situation makes us uncomfortable, we have to question, "Is it really worth it to say something? Do I really want to pick this battle?" I want women to know that if you want to assert yourself, you have every right to do so. You shouldn't feel shame for saying what you need to say. At the same time, if I let myself get sucked into internet comment mud-slinging every day, I wouldn't be able to do the work that I do: showing women that we can create positive changes in our life from a place of self-love. Showing others, at any weight or time in our life, we can choose a healthier and happier life. That bodies in progress are worthy of love! That's far more important to me than clashing with random people on the internet. And that's why it's just as important to be able to move forward as it is to stand up for yourself. State your case, and then rise above. Getting stuck in the back-and-forth will just drag you down and distract you from what really matters in your life. Of course, it's not always easy to move past hateful comments and messages. It's also pretty shocking to see the kind of things that some people say on the internet, especially when it's directed towards you. What helps me rise above that is remembering that it's not personal. While I may get comments about how I look or what I do, they're not really about me. They're about that person's own problematic idea about how women should look, act, and be. So if there's a chance to help someone see how their thought process is hurtful to women, I'll do that. If I can stand in solidarity with other women, I will. But at a certain point, I have to move on and focus on what I'm grateful for. There's always something, even if it's just a small nugget, to take away from every situation. For each negative

comment I may get, it comes alongside the beautiful opportunity to connect with women, and I know that's a gift. And that's what I'm really focusing on today.

You can't control other people and how they treat you. All you can bring to the table is the energy you want to put out into the world and how you want to feel. Our time is so much better spent lifting people up and creating a common bond, especially on the internet, than arguing with them and tearing them down.

If you want to speak up for yourself, do it. If that's challenging for you, you're not alone. I see you; I got you. And when you want to move forward, that's totally in your control. Whenever things get negative, I go back to what I can do. I know I can spread love. So that's what comes next.

Note: After a day online (with a massive response from my followers), I removed the conversation from Instagram. I was ready to move forward and to use the space on my page for positivity and encouragement.

Together, we rise!