

Anti-Diet Culture Gets Hijacked

[참고] 아래 시간 표시는 팟캐스트 웹사이트 기준으로, 어플에서 들을 때는 광고삽입 시간 등이 달라서 스크립트와 시간대가 다를 수 있습니다.

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In recent years, the body positivity movement has gained traction, especially on social media. Megan Jayne Crabbe tells her 1.1 million followers on Instagram to love their bodies.

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You and your body have had a long and challenging relationship, and we exist in a culture that encourages us to see our bodies as an enemy rather than a home.

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Meanwhile, nutritionist and influencer Shana Spence labels herself an eat-anything dietitian.

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Most of the time we're thinking in terms of subtraction, meaning what we can and can't eat. Try to think in terms of addition, meaning what you can add to your meals instead of what you have to subtract.

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And here's Lauren Leavell. She's a weight-inclusive fitness instructor.

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I didn't become a fitness instructor to convince people that they were broken, and so much of the wellness industry is convincing people that they're broken because if you're broken and there's something wrong with you, then I can sell you something to fix it.

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These influencers and others like them - they represent a whole pivot away from the diet and fitness culture that was embodied by companies like WeightWatchers, which focuses on losing weight as a path to healthier living.

Today, there is a broad anti-diet movement that posits that bodies can be healthy at any size, but this movement is being co-opted by other forces with other goals.

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There are elements of the anti-diet movement that have gone far beyond the original concerns, to make claims that are not consistent with nutrition science.

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That's Sasha Chavkin, a senior reporter for The Examination, a nonprofit newsroom covering global public health. He, along with reporters at The Washington Post, investigated the anti-diet movement and found that General Mills and other food companies were recruiting self-described anti-diet dietitians and influencers to promote sugary cereals and processed snacks, like in this TikTok video.

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Every time I pour a bowl of cereal, I'm reminded about the favorites I grew up on, which is why I'm partnering with General Mills. Honey Nut Cheerios were always my top pick, and that holds true today. As a registered dietitian, I will always advocate for fearlessly nourishing meals, including cereal, because everyone deserves to enjoy food without judgment, especially...

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CONSIDER THIS - as people who are part of the anti-diet movement saw an opportunity to practice and spread a message of self-love and acceptance, big food companies saw an opportunity to make money.

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Big food companies that are using anti-diet slogans are just co-opting the anti-diet movement.

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That's coming up. From NPR, I'm Ailsa Chang.

[중간 광고]

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It's CONSIDER THIS FROM NPR. Back in the 1960s, the anti-diet movement emerged to ease the burden of diet culture by fighting weight stigma and food shame. Now, many decades later, its argument is still loud and clear. Bodies can be healthy at any size. But a new investigation from The Washington Post and The Examination found that major food companies are distorting the messages of the movement and cashing in on these trends in order to sell processed snacks and sugary breakfast cereals. Sasha Chavkin is a senior reporter for The Examination, a nonprofit newsroom covering global public health. And I started our conversation by asking him what the anti-diet movement even is. Like, why did it emerge?

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The anti-diet movement began as an effort to fight back against weight discrimination and cultural obsession with thinness, which are huge problems in our society. One popular anti-diet approach is called Health at Every Size, which focuses on equal access to health care for heavier people. Another approach is called intuitive eating, which focuses on listening to internal cues about food and is often used for helping people with eating disorders. The common thread, I'd say, between these anti-diet approaches is they believe that diet culture is doing serious harm to people's health and well-being, and they're there to fight back against it.

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Right. And you and your colleagues identified one brand in particular, General Mills, which recruited anti-diet influencers and dietitians to promote its products online - like, sing the praises of sugary snacks, for example. And to be clear, General Mills is not the only food company that does this, right?

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That's right. We did an analysis of more than 6,000 social media posts by dietician influencers who had more than 10,000 followers, and we found that about 40% of them regularly used anti-diet language in their messages. We also found that of the ones who shared anti-diet messages, a majority of them were also doing sponsored posts for food and beverage companies.

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So food companies were disproportionately sponsoring anti-diet dietitians as messengers to promote their products. Now, General Mills took it to another level. Not only did they work with dietitians on social media who promoted General Mills cereals using the hashtag #DerailtheShame, but they funded a study into food shaming, which they said found that people who experienced food shaming had higher levels of isolation and mental health issues and were more likely to avoid the cereal aisle in grocery stores. And then they used the results of that study to argue against a proposed federal regulation that would add health information to the front of food packages. So essentially, they made the case that putting on food packages if a product is high in sugar or fat or another unhealthy ingredient was food-shaming consumers, and therefore, it needed to be opposed.

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And I understand that you spoke with people who encountered these certain aspects of the anti-diet movement online and ended up drastically changing their behavior in response. What happened to these people? How did that impact their health?

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I spoke with a woman named Jaye Rochon, who's a video editor based in Wisconsin, and she had struggled with weight loss diets for years. They left her feeling hungry and really were driving her crazy. And she then encountered these YouTube influencers promoting anti-diet approaches, who said that the worst thing she could be doing was restricting foods and she needed to stop avoiding the foods that she had been staying away from. And as a result of taking this advice, she gained 50 pounds in a period of two months. Eventually, when her weight got up close to 300 pounds, she started to really worry about her health. And she's now out of the anti-diet movement and is sharing her story because she wants other people to avoid going down the same path.

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What has General Mills said about all this, about allegations that it and other companies have co-opted the anti-diet movement for profit?

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General Mills sent a statement saying that it complies with federal regulations and that it provides accurate information based on science to the public. They

didn't answer our more detailed questions about their connections with the anti-diet movement or what they believe about some of the movement's claims about health and obesity. What I will add to that is that some of the leaders of the anti-diet movement are not OK with what General Mills is doing. For example, Elyse Resch, who's one of the co-founders of Intuitive Eating, told us that big food companies that are using anti-diet slogans are just trying to make more money, and they're co-opting the anti-diet movement.

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Where then does all of this ultimately leave the anti-diet movement as a whole and all of its messaging against body shaming and being afraid of food?

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Well, the anti-diet movement is a legitimate movement with real popularity, particularly among younger audiences, and fighting food shaming and weight discrimination and lack of access to healthcare are valid concerns. What I think the problem is that many anti-diet influencers have gone further and are making claims that are not backed by nutrition science. Some say that the health risks of obesity are overblown, or some even make the claim that diseases like diabetes and heart disease are caused by weight shaming and dieting rather than by excess weight itself. So there are elements of the anti-diet movement that have gone far beyond the original concerns to make claims that are not consistent with nutrition science.

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Sasha Chavkin is a senior reporter for The Examination, a nonprofit newsroom covering global public health. Thanks so much for your reporting.

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Thank you, Ailsa.