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OPINION

Binge Eating is a Hidden Hand in Obesity

The clock ran out for my brother

BY JILL RICHARDSON

If you looked at me, you might not be able to tell that I'm obese.

According to the measure of my Body Mass Index (BMI), I am. Slightly.

I don't wear plus-sized clothing, I've only got one chin, and you wouldn't mind sitting next to me on an airplane.

Most people who are considered overweight or obese in United States are a lot like me. In fact, even though 69 percent of adults were officially overweight or obese in 2012, only about 15 percent are so obese



that they're expected to suffer increased mortality.

My brother Adam was one of those people. He suffered from Binge Eating Disorder, a diagnosis psychologists didn't even recognize until 2013 — five years after his death.

During his life, my brother was mired in shame about his body and his eating. He hid his binges from our family. He lied about it. He told us he never ate fast food, but a glance at his bank statements after his death showed he was a regular at every drive-thru in town. And he made large purchases.

An estimated 3.5 percent of women and 2 percent of men share my brother's problem. Two-thirds of them are obese.

That includes a close friend

of mine. Unlike my brother, she doesn't keep her eating a secret. She hates it. She wants to stop. But she feels compelled to frequently eat beyond feeling full. And I don't think she knows why.

Others who binge eat have shared that they eat so much in order to block out their emotional pain. They want to fill their bellies until it hurts, so that the physical pain fully consumes them and their emotions disappear.

Some research suggests that binge eating might provide a high similar to smoking marijuana.

Often, public discussions of obesity focus on educating Americans to help them "make better choices." If you're suffering from Binge Eating Disorder, someone telling you

to eat an apple instead of a brownie isn't going to help.

Hounding people about their diets doesn't address the root causes of eating disorders. It's about as effective as telling an anorexic that she's too skinny and telling her to eat a big steak.

In fact, shaming someone with Binge Eating Disorder for his or her weight could even make the problem worse.

Not all obese people suffer from Binge Eating Disorder, but it's good to be aware that some do — especially since shame compels many sufferers to keep it a secret. And be compassionate. Because only through compassion and empathy can we help people facing this problem find their way back to health.

The clock ran out for my

brother, but I wonder what would have happened if he'd found help. What if he knew he didn't have to be ashamed of his binges? Or of his body?

Now that Binge Eating Disorder is an officially recognized diagnosis, we should change our national conversation about diet-related health problems to address it.

If you think your loved one or a friend might be suffering from this problem, offer real help — not diet advice. And for those of us who aren't medical professionals, the best help we can give might be love, empathy, and listening without judging.

OtherWords columnist Jill Richardson is the author of Recipe for America: Why Our Food System Is Broken and What We Can Do to Fix It.

How Could a Traffic Stop Turn Into All of This?

Sandra Bland's life mattered

BY MARC H. MORIAL

For many of us, it was with a sickening sense of familiarity that we watched the video recording of the violation of the welfare and rights of



yet another person of color at the hands of law enforcement. Unfolding right before our very eyes, we witnessed as another routine traffic stop would come to a tragic and fatal end.

Two days before authorities would discover Sandra Bland's lifeless body in her Texas jail cell, the 28-year-old called a friend after her first court appearance and left a 22-second voice-mail asking, "How did switching lanes with no signal turn into all of this? I don't even know."

The details of her arrest and her untimely death have left her family, friends, and those concerned about the treatment of people of color in our nation's criminal justice system, wondering the same: How could a traffic stop "turn into all of this?"

On Friday, July 10, Bland was

pulled over by state trooper Brian Encinia for the minor traffic violation. As seen on the officer's dashboard camera video, Encinia ordered Bland to step out of her car after she refused his order to put out her cigarette.

The confrontation between the two continued to escalate as Encinia attempted to pull Bland out of her car and then threatened to use his taser gun on her. The remainder of the confrontation, and her eventual arrest, is not caught on camera, but we can hear her screaming during the arrest that the trooper is about to break her wrist and that he has slammed her head into the ground. She was taken to the Waller County jail on a charge of assaulting a public servant during a traffic stop.

Three days later, on Monday, July 13, Bland was discovered dead in her jail cell after allegedly hanging herself with a garbage bag. A medical examiner has ruled the death suicide by hanging, but her family and protestors are disputing the autopsy results. Bland's relatives have ordered a private autopsy and Waller County District Attorney

Elton Mathis has opened up a probe into Bland's death and has said that his office will treat her case like a murder investigation.

We don't yet know how Sandra Bland died in her jail cell, but the video of her arrest is cause enough for grave concern. And for those committed to reforming our nation's broken criminal justice system, it is an urgent call for action.

As the litany of names of unarmed black and brown men and women brutalized and killed by law enforcement multiplies, so does the skepticism and distrust so many feel for a system that has proven time and again to be stacked against them and their communities at every level of justice.

Encinia's behavior at the traffic stop was incendiary, unjustified and beyond unprofessional. The Texas Department of Public Safety must not tolerate this disrespectful and provocative method of policing from Encinia—or any officer. Officers are supposed to be trained to de-escalate tense situations, not escalate them.

We cannot limit our concern and anger to motionless outrage. While we mourn the loss

of countless victims of police violence and injustice, we must be loud and engaged advocates for the sort of change that will save lives and rebuild that much-needed trust between law enforcement and all communities entrusted to their care and protection. Attorney General Loretta Lynch has expressed her hope that the tragic loss of Sandra Bland will galvanize more law enforcement departments to institute de-escalation training. This is the kind of training that could have saved Bland's life.

We reiterate our call — as we have in the wake of far too many incidents of police violence — for the comprehensive retraining of all police officers, the review

and strengthening of police hiring standards and the widespread use of body and dashboard cameras. We will continue to hold law enforcement accountable when it fails to treat all citizens fairly and with dignity.

We will work to bridge the widespread and dangerous distrust between law enforcement and too many communities of color. And we will dedicate ourselves to this mission for our nation's sake, for Bland and for the innumerable others taken by police violence that are no longer here to fight for us or with us.

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