

# “YOU’VE PUT ON...”

## Let’s start a Revolution!

by Malayna Dawn

I’m sure everyone in Sri Lanka has been greeted with the phrase “You’ve put on...” and I’m sure just about everyone hated it. At least that’s the impression I get when I talk to people – they hate it when others say it to them, and yet some of these same people perpetuate it. However everyone seems resigned to accept it rather than change it.

I come from L.A., where even the hint that someone has put on weight is enough to warrant physical violence. The ONLY time it is deemed even remotely acceptable is if you know the person wanted to put on weight. It is thought to be a great compliment to tell someone they look like they’ve lost weight. Of course, this can be an insult to someone who was trying desperately not to, or to someone who lost the

weight because of an illness, so this can backfire as well.

Why do Sri Lankans seem to feel the need to comment on a person’s weight? Do they really think their victim doesn’t know? Is it to show that you care enough to have paid attention to how they looked the last time you saw them, and remembered enough to compare? Is it to prove that you’re not just pretending to know and remember them? I would have thought it was a way to tell people “I don’t like you” right off the bat, but if this is the case, a number of my Sri Lankan family don’t really love me. Perhaps it’s a way to establish dominance, the way our brethren in the animal kingdom do.

I once tried to pre-empt such an attack by announcing to a roomful of people that

I brought home a few more pounds from vacation than I had left with. It didn’t work. My offering of “You’re looking lovely” was met with “And you’ve put on...I just thought you would like to know.” I yelled “I know! I already told you that earlier!” I stopped myself before responding further – but it took a lot of willpower.

In any case, I propose a revolution. I offer two opposite approaches. The first, to have ready comebacks for people who foist this phrase upon us. These will be done with the goal of making them think twice before they say it again – to anyone, but especially to us. The second, to introduce alternative and more preferable phrases into the social mainstream. This approach is kinder, but perhaps not as much fun.

### OPTION A: The Shut-Down

Of course, you’ll need to tailor this to each individual situation. You wouldn’t use the same retort on your aunt as on a friend.

- “I was just going to say the same to you!”
- “I was just about to pay you a compliment, but forget it now.”
- “Actually I haven’t, but you certainly have!”
- “I can lose weight, but what will you do?”
- “I’m delighted to see you too. Maybe next time you’ll tell me I smell bad.”
- “And you have food in your teeth” (especially if they don’t – or “you have something hanging out of your nose.”)
- Turn away immediately, ending all conversation.
- Immediately break down into loud, racking sobs.

### OPTION B: The Good Example

- “You’re looking well”
- “You look healthy”
- “You seem happy”
- “I love what you’re wearing!”
- “You look great!”
- “I hope you feel as well as you look.” (If you don’t like them and they look bad, this can be a satisfying insult as well.)

There are endless variations and I’m sure you can come up with better ones than I have. The point is to put an end to this horrible way of greeting each other. Otherwise, I may snap one day and I will not be responsible for my actions!

Until recently, obesity was seen as a sign of wealth. In Imperial Rome, a little pudginess on the part of the patrician Senators reminded the masses where the money was, and where the food came from.

The Victorian kings needed a lot of support from girdles, belts, etc. to help them get up and around.

Even in the 1960’s, a well-fed kid was a happy, healthy, wealthy kid.

From “Is there Wealth in Weight?” <http://www.angelfire.com/d20/dice5/fat.html>

Thirty years ago most Chinese people celebrated plumpness as a sign of prosperity and robust health.

Similarly, plump babies were much admired as symbols of good luck and were depicted as such in popular art and religious iconography.

The opposite condition – thinness – was avoided at all costs, given that an emaciated body represented bad luck, hard times, and early death.

The stigma of emaciation was such that even during affluent years thin people had difficulty finding marriage partners. It was assumed that they would not live to bear or support children.

From “A Social History of Obesity in China” [web.mit.edu/lipoff/www/hapr/fall01\\_health/prosperity.pdf](http://web.mit.edu/lipoff/www/hapr/fall01_health/prosperity.pdf)