

New York Times Summer Reading Contest

A Wellness Chatbot Is Offline After Its “Harmful” Focus on Weight Loss

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/06/08/us/ai-chatbot-tessa-eating-disorders-association.html>

“Looks like you gained a couple pounds,” my ballet teacher announced, carefully examining me up and down. I laughed awkwardly beside my peers, trying to style it out. She shook her head, gave my 14-year-old self one last look, and moved on to another ballerina.

Her words damaged my confidence like lemon on an open wound. I wished at that moment that I could crawl into bed; I wished I could hide my skin under baggy clothing; I wished that I had a “perfect body.” Living in a strict environment as dancers, it is very easy for young people like me to spiral into an eating disorder. In this case, the criticism came from an adult I respected. As the world shifts, we now face this same level of scrutiny from technology too.

In her article, “A Wellness Chatbot Is Offline After Its ‘Harmful’ Focus on Weight Loss” Lauren McCarthy discusses the dangers of AI in a world of body shaming. She reminds us how quickly weight control and dieting, “‘gets extreme and gets out of someone’s control,’ which can harm their mind and body.” Young, aspiring ballet dancers deal with harsh criticism about our physical appearance daily. With each comment from my teacher, I find myself more reluctant to look in a mirror. I’ve learned that I have an “imperfect body.” So when my instructor follows up with: “You should probably start controlling your weight,” I take a big breath in and remain silent.

I wish I could take my teacher offline like they did with that harmful chatbot.

This was successfully submitted on 28th June for week 3. It then went on to win an honorable mention against 889 other student submissions.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/07/11/learning/my-love-for-queer-literature-the-week-3-winner-of-our-summer-reading-contest.html>