Fat Studies: Teaching About Weightism as a Social Justice Issue

- Patti Watkins, Ph.D.
  - pwatkins@oregonstate.edu
  - Clinical Health Psychologist
  - Psychological Science
  - Women Studies
    - Women, Weight, & Body Image
    - Fat Studies
Bias Based on Difference

- Gender (Sexism)
  - Women

- Race/Ethnicity (Racism)
  - People of Color/Non-European Heritage

- Sexual Orientation (Heterosexism)
  - People who identify as LGBTQ

- Social Class (Classism)
  - People of Lower SES

- Age (Ageism)
  - People on extremes of age continuum

- Physical or Mental Ability (Ableism)
  - People who are differently abled

- Weight (Weightism/Sizeism)
  - People with greater BMIs or whose weight exceeds that of societal standards for physical appearance, i.e. “beauty norms”
Weightism

- System that facilitates privilege and oppression based on …
  - Random variations in *supposed* personal attractiveness (e.g., body shape, weight, and size)
  - A *supposed* connection to poor health status
Difference, Power, & Discrimination

WHITE PRIVILEGE

- Peggy McIntosh
  - Can rent, buy a house
  - Neighbors will be nice
  - Can behave badly and not be attributed to race
  - Can buy posters, dolls, magazines with people who look like me
  - Can choose public accommodation without being treated badly
  - Can get medical help and be treated well

THIN PRIVILEGE

- Linda Bacon
  - Have greater career opportunities
  - Can pay for only one airline seat (and not be treated badly)
  - Find fashionable clothing in my size (and treated with respect)
  - Have a greater dating pool
  - Respected and listened to when talking about weightism
Linda Bacon, Ph.D.

- Nutrition Professor
  - Biology Dept, CCSF
  - Health At Every Size
Sources of Weight Bias

- Institutional
  - Media
  - Medicine
  - Employment
  - Education
  - Housing
  - Business
  - Law Enforcement
  - Government
    - Including weight-based health promotion programs
Experience with the Legal System

I have recently had a very bad experience with legal challenges and in the report I received from my lawyer, the police listed in their description of me on their standardized form, under the heading of appearance that I was ‘Dirty.’ I am not now, nor then was I then ‘Dirty.’ This is a prejudicial term and the officer, I think, said that rather than ‘fat.’

Few Legal Protections

- San Francisco
- Washington DC
- Michigan
Sources of Weight Bias

- Interpersonal
  - Parents
  - Siblings
  - Peers
  - Partners
  - Teachers
  - Coaches
  - Co-workers
  - Strangers
Effects of Weight Bias

- Body Image Disorders
- Anxiety
- Low Self-Esteem
- Self-Blame
- Avoidance of...
  - Physical activity
  - Health care visits
- Depression
- Suicide


- Effects are long-lasting into adulthood
  - Mclaren et al. (2004) Psychology & Health
Weight bias and discrimination have increased exponentially over the past decade


Weight bias and discrimination are on par with bias and discrimination based on race

- Greater for women
- Greater for women of color

Social Justice Issue

- Weight-based oppression intersects with oppression based on other areas of difference

- Dr. Bianca Wilson
  - Fat Black Lesbian and Bisexual Health Disparities
Fat Studies

- Interdisciplinary field that...
  - Addresses Weight Bias
    - Intersections with gender, race, class, sexual orientation, age, and ability
    - Socially acceptable proxy for other forms of bias
  - Social Justice Issue
  - Reclaims the word “Fat”
- Promotes Size Acceptance
  - Self
  - Others
- Questions Traditional Models of Health
  - Health At Every Size vs. Weight Loss
Health At Every Size

- Promotes health for people of all sizes
- Recognizes that individuals can be fat and fit
- Recognizes that thinness is not synonymous with health
- Recognizes that weight may correlate with but not cause disease and early mortality
- Recognizes that weight loss interventions are ineffective and has deleterious physical and psychological side effects
Health At Every Size: A New Paradigm

- **HAES Tenets**
  - Enhancing physical and psychosocial health *without* focusing on weight loss or achieving an “ideal weight”
  - Promoting size (and self) acceptance; respecting and appreciating diversity of body shapes, sizes, and features
  - Promoting eating based on internal hunger cues, nutritional needs, and pleasure rather than external food plans or diets
  - Promoting physical activity for physical and psychosocial health benefits and enjoyment rather than regimented exercise with the goal of weight loss
  - Ending weight bias; recognizing that weight is not indicative of personality, intelligence, health behaviors, hygiene, moral character or other measures of worth
De-emphasizes weight in health/medical communications, eliminating a source of stigma and anxiety for people of any weight.

Does not ask people to control what may not be controllable, preventing damaging cycles of body loathing, weight-cycling, and feelings of ineffectiveness.

Does not try to prevent “obesity” but rather body neglect and abuse.

Offers a comprehensive approach to valuing and caring for our own and others’ human bodies regardless of weight, size, and shape.
Fat Studies Scholars

- Esther Rothblum
  - San Diego State University
  - Psychology/Women Studies

- Samantha Murray
  - Macquarie University
  - Critical & Cultural Studies

- Marilyn Wann
  - “Free Range Fat Activist”

- Amy Farrell
  - Dickinson College
  - American Studies
  - Women’s & Gender Studies
Interdisciplinary Scholarship

- Abigail Saguy
  - Sociology
    - http://www.soc.ucla.edu/professors/ABIGAIL%20C.%20SAGUY/?id=53
- Glenn Gaesser
  - Exercise Physiology
- Paul Ernsberger
  - Neuroscience/Nutrition
- Paul Campos
  - Law
- Eric Oliver
  - Political Science
- Michael Gard
  - Sports Science/Gender Studies
Resources

- National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance
  - [http://www.naafaonline.com/dev2/](http://www.naafaonline.com/dev2/)
- Psychology Today-I Take Up Space
  - [http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/i-take-space](http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/i-take-space)
- Health At Every Size
  - [http://www.lindabacon.org/resources.html](http://www.lindabacon.org/resources.html)
- Association for Size Diversity and Health
  - [http://www.sizediversityandhealth.org/](http://www.sizediversityandhealth.org/)
- Yale Rudd Center-Weight Bias
I Stand Against Weight Bias

**Resources**

- *Fat Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Body Weight and Society*
  - [http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/ufts20/current](http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/ufts20/current)

  - [http://www.springerlink.com/content/0360-0025/66/9-10/](http://www.springerlink.com/content/0360-0025/66/9-10/)

- *Somatechnics* (March 2012)
  - [http://www.euppublishing.com/toc/soma/2/1](http://www.euppublishing.com/toc/soma/2/1)

- *Health At Every Size* (2000-2006)

- *International Journal of Epidemiology* (Feb 2006)
  - [http://ije.oxfordjournals.org/content/35/1.toc](http://ije.oxfordjournals.org/content/35/1.toc)
Human Rights Casualties from the “War on Obesity”: Why Focusing on Body Weight Is Inconsistent with a Human Rights Approach to Health

Lily O'Hara & Jane Gregg

Abstract

An increase in average body weight has been the subject of intense attention from public health authorities over the past decade. The weight-centered health paradigm and resulting concerns about the “obesity epidemic” are the foundation for public health policies and programs around the world. International human rights treaties describe the legal obligations of states and the moral obligations of other actors in society to respect, protect, and fulfill human rights, including the right to health. The authors critique the weight-centered health paradigm through the lens of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Public health researchers and practitioners may inadvertently breach their human rights obligations by working within the weight-centered health paradigm.
Resources

- Films in OSU Library
  - Beyond Killing Us Softly
  - Body: The Value of Women
  - Dieting: At War with Our Bodies
  - Diet Wars
  - Disfigured
  - The Size of It
  - Weightless

- Fat
  - [link](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p4fRuRoXhXs)
- America the Beautiful 2
  - [link](http://americathebeautifuldoc.com/2/atb/the-thin-commandments/)
Fat people are human beings who vary in personality characteristics, intellect, personal hygiene, health and fitness status just like so-called “normal” people!

Fat people are equally deserving of humane, ethical treatment in all spheres of life!

The personal accounts gave more weight to issues linked to how our culture of thinness has created a value system of hierarchy based on appearance---where thinness has become synonymous with health and self-control, while fatness is equated with excuses, laziness and in the case of the episode is linked to ‘encouraging’ forms of punishment. If you replaced the word thinness for white and added individuals of color instead of fat persons, we see a distinct relationship between characteristics used during the civil rights movement and stereotypes present currently.