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BREAKING THE FAT STIGMA



Samantha Hall

INTRO

Hi, this is me.

I am a plus size woman. According to my BMI, which the medical world still tends to use (even though it's extremely flawed), I am considered "obese" and to be "normal" weight, I should lose 100 pounds (I can't even imagine that!). Maybe some people think I should lose weight, and maybe others don't. But what I can tell you is that I am a healthy young woman. I workout multiple times a week, go on daily walks, and have a clean bill of health with no concerns. I've been made fun of because of my weight, and been told by my own family members I would be "prettier" if I lost some pounds. I do many things that should help me to lose weight, yet I am still larger.

On the flip side, my sister who is 2 years older than me, doesn't work out, spends hours of the day in bed, and eats candy and chips throughout the day, and is actually losing weight. She has never been told to "stop eating junk", or to "work out" by any "concerned" family members because her body doesn't **show** the "unhealthy" in her weight.

But apparently mine does. As a society, we are so ingrained to think that weight = health, but that is not always the case. "Fitness, not weight, is actually the most accurate measure of a person's health and life expectancy" (Martin).



FATPHOBIA

What is it?

Fatphobia: is the fear and dislike of fat people and the stigmatization of individuals with bigger bodies.

Fat-shaming and biases, even internalized ones, stem from fatphobia.



Being fat has always been associated with "you've done something wrong". That they need to be "corrected", internalizing within bigger people that "you aren't ok the way you are". "Fatphobia can end up shaming, silencing and "correcting" fat people simply for existing. It feeds the bias, discrimination, disregard and sometimes even hatred that all fat people have to contend with on a daily basis" (Action Canada).

Systems that Perpetuate Fatphobia:

- the medical industrial complex
- the diet industry
- the media industry
- public standard size seats
- standard size clothing that is not accessible to fat people

"All of these things teach fat people that this world was not made to fit them"

"Why do we feel entitled to comment on anyone's health when we most likely know nothing about them, their health, nutritional choices or fitness activity?"

Actions and Comments that Stem from Fatphobia:

- policing what someone is eating
- complimenting weight loss as inherently always good
- telling fat people about their own health as if they don't know any better
- giving unsolicited advice on weight loss.

"Western culture has accorded to thinness mean that these people will never be subject to the same interrogations, or faux concerns, about their health" (Khoo).

a couple "unhealthy" things American society glamorizes that no one seems to shame:

drinking smoking stress/working too much

There are many other things that can cause weight gain that have nothing to do with what foods you eat, or other stigmas fat people have to deal with (lazy, unmotivated, etc).

- Hormonal imbalances
- Genetics
- Instances of childhood abuse
- sexual assault
- peer bullying
- fractured familial relationships

WEIGHT ≠ HEALTH

there's more to it

Fat stigma has led us to draw a direct and exclusive connection between fatness and ill health, often disregarding the many other aspects of a person's life that also bear on their bodies and health (Khoo).



American society constantly deems fat people as "unhealthy" because it's one aspect of health that you are able to see. "It's only when it shows on your body that you care about anyone's cardiovascular disease risk" (Hobbes & Marshall).

FAT SHAMING AND WOMEN

Though both men and women are body shamed, women face the brunt of it because of societies expectations towards women, deeming them as only important as their physical appearance. "Women are continued to be designed for lust" (Hobbes & Marshall). And with that, American society, especially within the media has ingrained in us that being fat is unattractive and disgusting. Not desirable.

"America is still a gender unequal society, and women are still judged more in terms of their value for men"

"Oftentimes, when women are policed for the way they look, they're not even particularly large. The word and the concept of fat are used as a threat. It's coded language used to keep women in line, remind them not to take up space, not to be too loud, not to enjoy themselves too much, not to have too much sex, and not to make too much money" (Friedman).



Fat people are less likely to be hired, with 85% of hiring managers saying they wouldn't even consider hiring a fat woman.

"We are said to have an "obesity epidemic" in the West, but there is no evidence that larger fashion models are anything to do with shifts in the size of the general population. The overwhelming majority of models are at the thinner end of the scale and yet the public are still getting heavier" (Preen).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Friedman, Vanessa. "Why America Hates Fat Women, the Feminist Take." *Shape*, Meredith Corporation, 27 Jan.

2020, www.shape.com/lifestyle/mind-and-body/why-america-hates-fat-women-feminist-take. This article supported my argument that the "standard beauty ideal" tries to police women into being a certain way because the American society still sees women for what they can provide "sexually". It also explains that the term "fat" is used to insult even non-fat women to "keep them in line".

Hobbes, M., & Marshall, S., hosts. "The Obesity Epidemic." *You're Wrong About*, Apple Podcasts, 19 Sep.

2018. <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/youre-wrong-about/id1380008439?mt=2>. This podcast had good points about the discrimination that fat people face, and how being larger is always associated with negativity in American society. It also highlights the many ways that unhealthy thin people are treated better than healthy bigger people.

"Inscribing Gender on the Body." *Women's Voices, Feminist Visions: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, by Susan M.

Shaw and Janet Lee, 4th ed., McGraw-Hill Education, 2015, pp. 223-243. This chapter in the textbook focuses on the "standard beauty ideal" that America sets for its women. This chapter helped me with making my point that fat women don't fit into this small standard, and will therefore be discriminated against.

Khoo, Jamie. "Fat People Do Not Need Your Concerns about Their Health." *The Conversation*, The Conversation US, Inc., 4 Feb. 2020, theconversation.com/fat-people-do-not-need-your-concerns-about-their-health-102863. This was another article that helped with my understanding of the bias and discrimination against fat people day to day. The piece explains that thin people will never be asked or interrogated about their health regarding their size, even if they actually live unhealthier lives than bigger people. They just don't show the so-called "unhealthy" like bigger people do. It also reminded me that the American society glamorizes many types of unhealthy activities, yet people rarely get chastised or discriminated against those because their weight doesn't show it.

Martin, Courtney E. "Love Your Fat Self." *Utne*, Ogden Publications, Inc., 2008, www.utne.com/politics/love-your-fat-self?PageId=1#axzz33nK22ljV. This article

helped me to understand that sizeism is one of the only forms of discrimination still accepted in many societies. It aided my arguments on why there's more than meets the eye with larger people, and their size is not a direct indicator of their health.

Preen, Katy. "Just Admit That You Hate Fat People." Medium, Medium, 5 Sept. 2018, medium.com/@KatyPreen/just-admit-that-you-hate-fat-people-c6c7d7eafc65. This article helps to explain how fat shaming does not work to try to shame people into losing weight, it actually does the opposite. A main focus of this article was a Cosmopolitan cover that featured Tess Holiday, and it's backlash, saying she "promotes obesity" when there in fact is no evidence to support that, and actually, models for the most part are getting thinner.

Stryker, Kitty. "Fatphobia: A Guide for the Disbeliever." HuffPost, HuffPost, 7 Dec. 2017, www.huffpost.com/entry/fatphobia-a-guide-for-the_b_5214754. This article aided me in understanding the daily struggles bigger people go through, and affirmed the negative feelings that many larger people have about their weight. Stryker also emphasized that the "beauty ideal" is created and perpetuated by "wealthy white standards".

Unknown. "Avoiding Fatphobia and Sizeism in Health Care." Sexual and Reproductive Health Awareness Week, Action Canada for Sexual & Health Rights, www.srhweek.ca/providers/people-and-communities/sizeism-and-fatphobia/. This article was able to help me in understanding the biases in the health care industry towards fat people. This bias results in unfair treatment and disregard of actual health concerns, pinning the issue to: "you need to lose weight". This supported my arguments by informing me that there are many reasons in which why someone has a larger body type, and that being "lazy" or "eating junk food" isn't always the culprit (which is what many health care workers believe unfortunately).

Your Fat Friend. "7 Ways to Uproot Your Anti-Fat Bias." Medium, Human Parts, 26 May 2020, humanparts.medium.com/7-ways-to-uproot-your-anti-fat-bias-54f01d76ec3b. This was a great article in helping me understand how people with a fat bias can learn to dismantle that judgement. This also gave me some good evidence on fat women in the workplace, stating that 85% of hiring managers wouldn't hire bigger women.

Your Fat Friend. "ICYMI Fat Shaming Is Still Bad for Public Health." SELF, Condé Nast., 8 Oct. 2019, www.self.com/story/fat-shaming-is-still-bad-for-public-health. This article helped by giving me evidence that fat shaming is actually one of the main reasons for people gaining weight and the driver in this "so-called obesity epidemic". This article also provided other evidence on how this is also affecting larger people's mental health as well.

Your Fat Friend. "Weight Stigma Is a Dangerous Threat to Health." Medium, Elemental, 16 Dec. 2019, elemental.medium.com/weight-stigma-is-a-dangerous-threat-to-health-8b8f524873fa. This article helps to explain more issues that bigger people face in the medical field. It also emphasizes that peoples "concerns" about other people's weight does not come from a genuine place, but more of a "well-intended bullying".