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### Fatness, Intersectionality, and Environmental Justice: Working Towards Health and Sustainability

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# Fatness, Intersectionality, & Environmental Justice: Working Towards Health and Sustainability

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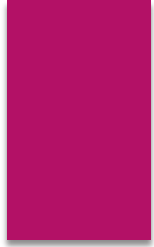
Meg Panichelli, PhD, MSW  
Department of Undergraduate Social Work  
West Chester University of PA



# Locating ourselves

Dr. Meg Panichelli

Dr. Ginneh Akbar



“Who benefits when we gaze incessantly at the fat on our bellies, thighs and upper arms—squandering our energy and money—rather than turning our attention squarely to the problems of tremendous income inequality, violence in our neighborhoods, endless wars and war profiteering, water scarcity, and global climate change? Who gets to make decisions about those issues while the masses are fixated on reducing their size?”

(Farrell, 2015, p.3)

- What was your relationship with food like growing up?
- What messages did you get about your body?
- How did it impact your body image?
- Where did you get these messages?
- Have the messages changed over the course of your life?





# Critical Discourse Analysis

- ▶ "Fat" Discourse in Selected Social Work Journals
  - ▶ Social Work
  - ▶ Journal of Social Work Education
  - ▶ Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work
  - ▶ Health and Social Care in Community
- ▶ Journal of Gerontological Social Work
- ▶ Journal of Social Work and Public Health
- ▶ Journal of Social Work
- ▶ Child Development
- ▶ Social Work Education
- ▶ Social Work in Health Care



# Examples of Fat Discourse

- ▶ Fat
- ▶ Obese
- ▶ Health
- ▶ Overweight
- ▶ Others?
- ▶ Fat Oppression
- ▶ Fat Liberation
- ▶ Fat Activism
- ▶ Sizeism
- ▶ Fatism
- ▶ Healthism
- ▶ Health at Every Size



# UN Sustainable Development Goals

- ▶ Gender Equality
- ▶ Good Health and Well-Being
- ▶ Clean Water and Sanitation
- ▶ Decent Work and Economic Growth
- ▶ No Poverty
- ▶ Zero Hunger
- ▶ Quality Education
- ▶ Reduced Inequalities





# Intersectionality

- ▶ Developed out of Black Feminist Thought
- ▶ Gender, race, nation, sexuality, disability, age, class, body size, migration status, and indigeneity are socially constructed categories
- ▶ Racism, sexism, heterosexism, cissexism, ageism, ableism, religious-based oppression, xenophobia, and other forms of oppression are interconnected or interlocking

(Collins, 1991; Crenshaw, 1989; Mehrotra, 2010; DeVries, 2014 and others...)



# Environmental Justice

- ▶ The fight for EJ is a grassroots fight against the toxicity of various industries, the military, corporate greed, profit-driven governance, and, increasingly, policing and systems of incarceration.
- ▶ Environmental Justice activism and scholarship responds to the spatial violence of racism and capitalism, which reproduce both uneven development across racially segregated communities and high levels of toxicity—physical and social—in communities of color.

(Purifoy, 2019)



# For Reflection & Discussion

When was the first time?

When was the last time?



Have you ever told someone “you’re not fat you’re beautiful”?

# Diet culture does not exist in a vacuum

- ▶ Diet culture is just one social system in which people are treated inequitably, and it often overlaps with racism, sexism, ageism, ableism, and classism.
- ▶ Inequity taught in Discourse
  - ▶ Morality
  - ▶ Criminal
  - ▶ Raced, Classed, Gendered, Sexed, Aged, Disabled



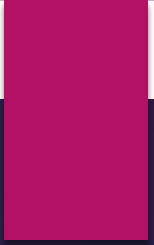
Ijeoma Oluo

I don't want to hear about your diet. I don't want to hear about your weight loss. Doesn't mean you can't talk about it, but I hope you will consider how you discuss a topic so ingrained with misogyny, classism, racism and fatphobia. The body size you are excited to leave behind is also the body someone else is living in and trying against the chorus of our entire culture to love themselves in today. Please remember that.



# Diet Culture Self Check...

- ← What is your reaction to the word “fat” does it bring a negative association?
- ← Are you scared of being fat?
- ← Have you ever asked “does this make me look fat?”
- ← Do you have fat friends?
- ← Do you feel the need to lose weight for vacations and other special events in your life?
- ← Do you assume fat people are funny, friendly or jolly?
- ← Do you believe that it's a fat person's fault for being fat?
- ← Have you ever said “you're so skinny you can eat whatever you want?”



- ← When conversations about fat people come up do you say “but their health...?”
- ← Do you equate thinness with health? Or smaller bodies with healthy bodies?
- ← Have you talked about “the obesity epidemic”
- ← Do you comment on people’s weight? (losing or gaining)
- ← Or told someone they look great because they lost weight?
- ← Do you call certain foods “bad” “good” or “guilt-free” “sinful” (and then internalizing the message to believe that you are good or bad because you ate a certain food?)
- ← Do you buy into the concept of a “cheat day”
- ← Have you ever said “carbs are so bad for you”
- ← Do you engage and bond with others over diet talk?
- ← Have you ever said “I need to lose 5 pounds”
- ← Have you ever judged someone or been worried about being judged for having seconds
- ← Have you ever used the term “pre-pregnancy body”

# Spoiler Alert: Diet Culture is Everywhere

- ▶ Diet culture is a system of knowledge, values, and meanings that supports interpretations of personal health choices as moral character.
- ▶ Diet culture is not just about weight loss
- ▶ Diet culture does not support the value of all bodies
- ▶ Diet culture does not exist in a vacuum
- ▶ So we might not necessarily consider ourselves to be on a 'diet', but because of the diet culture we live within, we still have thoughts, beliefs and behaviours that have been strongly influenced by diet culture.



# Food & Diet Industry



# Diet culture is not just about weight loss...

- What diet culture does is convince people that their bodies need to be smaller
- Assigns hierarchical value to bodies
- Concerned with all the choices people make about the food they eat and equating food with morality.
- Cheetos=bad, carrots=good. Vegan diets=good, choosing not to eat vegetables=bad. Sugar=bad, raw honey=good.

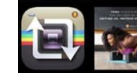


Linda Bacon

@LindaBaconHAES

Poverty and lack of opportunity matter more to public health outcomes than weight, diet or exercise behaviors. For most disadvantaged people, no amount of extra gym time can outweigh time in the unemployment line.

2018-06-06, 10:01 AM



@diannebondyyoga

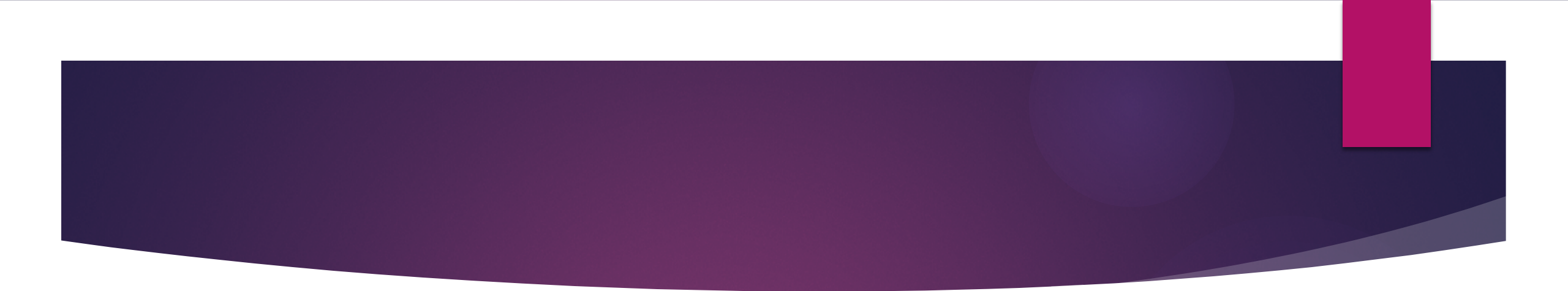


249 likes

**benourishedpdx** The social determinants of health are often cast aside so that diet and fitness culture can sell behavioral change. Keep the lens wide and question anyone selling solutions and plans. More critical analysis, less personal responsibility please.

View all 2 comments

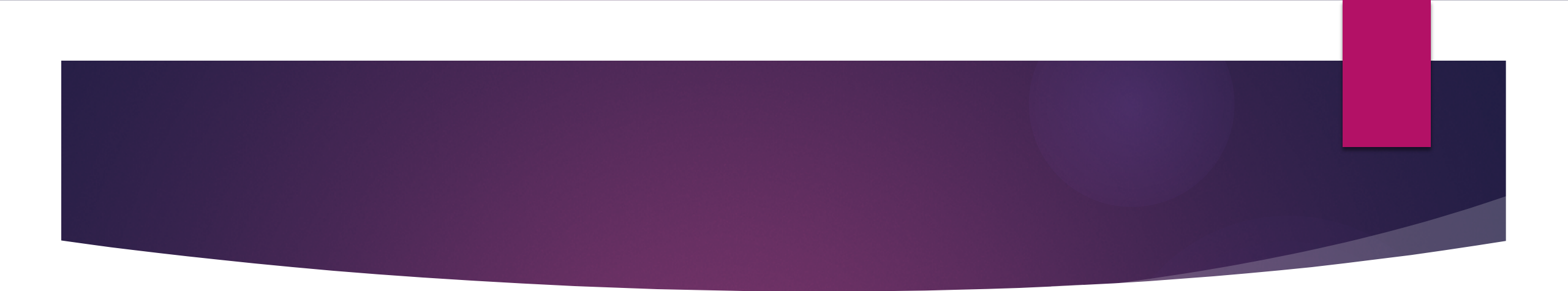


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- Ex: Cheetos invoke our broken food system, inequities with food access, and people (coded as poor people or people of color)
    - Carrots invoke farmer's markets, wholesome living, and people (coded as white, economically stable) who value their health.
  - Diet culture assigns “goodness” to certain lifestyles and choices, and that’s morality.
    - We prize restriction and equate “self-control” with strong character.



- Diet culture is clearest is in advertisements for fitness products; there are lots of good reasons to exercise that you can't see on the body examples; Even physical changes that can come from exercise—improved function for joints, heart, lungs, and muscles—can't be seen.



- 
- ▶ Yet most fitness product promise that we'll look more attractive with exercise and often leave out other benefits, sending the subtle message that your body as it is has inherently less value than it could have because of how it looks.
  - ▶ Fitness advertising is also notoriously ableist, meaning that exercise should be used to “overcome” or avoid disability because disabled bodies have less value. This isn't a naturally-occurring condition—it's a direct result of diet culture.



# Hmmm...

“In 2013, the Journal of the American Medical Association published a large scale review and metaanalysis of all the studies done to date on health risks related to body mass index. The results? It turns out that the “most healthy” weight category in terms of morbidity and mortality is overweight. The group of people classified as “obese level one” show no difference in health compared to the “normal” weight people. Health risks rise for people in the categories of underweight and very obese. Significantly, however, there are no movements to identify “thinness” as a disease—a symptom, perhaps, of anorexia or malnutrition, but not a disease in and of itself.”

(Farrell, 2015, p.1)



[drginnehakbar](#)



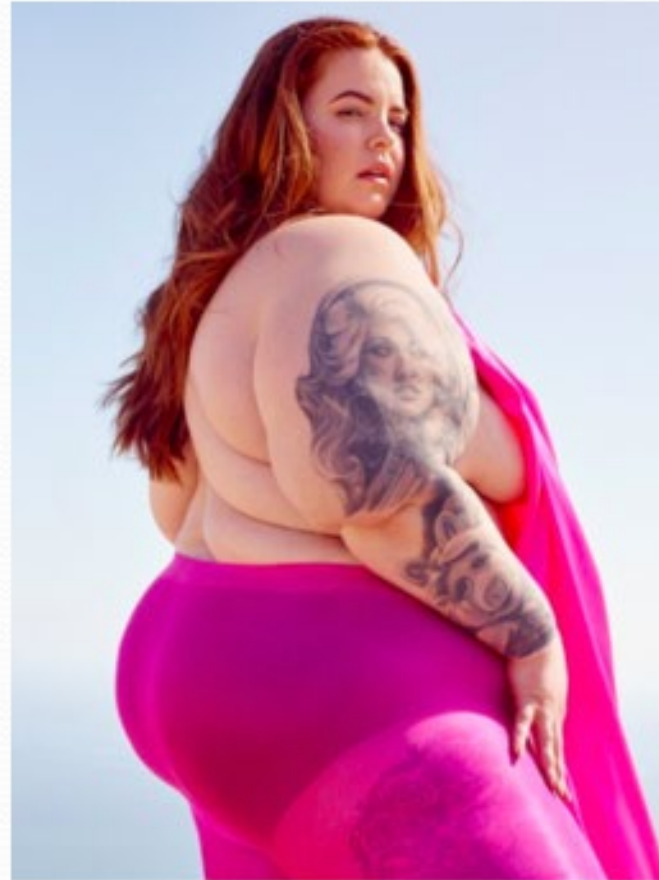
Liked by [jen\\_in\\_mville](#), [cutiepopshop\\_](#) and 151 others

[drginnehakbar](#) I have no idea how much I weigh. I made the decision a while ago not to let a number on a scale dictate what I was going to eat that day or how I felt about myself for the rest of the week. All bodies are beautiful. Diet culture is harmful. As a mom of daughters I can't criticize my body and expect them to learn to love themselves. It's a myth that skinny = healthy. I eat what want, whatever tastes good and makes me feel good. I exercise ways that make my body feel good. I believe it's the clothes job to fit me and not my job to fit into clothes. [#bopo](#) [#bodypositive](#) [#bodypositivity](#) [#intuitiveeating](#) [#ie](#) [#joyfulmovement](#) [#haes](#) [#healthateverysize](#) [#notabouttheweight](#) [#ditchthescale](#) [#effyourbeautystandards](#) [#curvygirlsrock](#) [#curvyfashion](#) [#allbodiesaregoodbodies](#) [#trustyourbody](#)



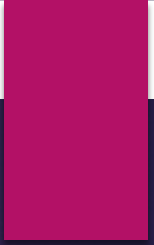
# Tess Holliday's Health Is None of Your Business

“There’s a certain type of internet commenter that any fat woman on social media is undoubtedly familiar with: The concern troll. If you are a fat woman with the unmitigated gall to present yourself as happy or beautiful, concern trolls will tell you that you are not healthy and should focus on losing weight. They will also often accuse you of “glorifying obesity” for not publicly hating or castigating yourself for existing while not thin. Of course, these folks don’t know how healthy you are or aren’t. But they are determined to “help” you. Yeah. Right.”



“I just refuse to go down that road, and to feel like I need to prove my health and my worth to people that don't care,” she says. “There's a famous quote, I don't know who said it but I use it all the time: ‘Never waste your time explaining yourself to people who are committed to misunderstanding you.’”

<https://www.facebook.com/TheScarletLetterReports/videos/tess-holliday-on-challenging-body-shamers-s2-e1/260716374623232/>  
L



# Weight Stigma & Fatphobia

# How This Shows Up in Society

- ▶ In employment, fat employees are often seen as lazy, sloppy, disagreeable, less conscientious, etc. They tend to be paid less for the same jobs, have lower paying jobs, and are promoted less often than their thinner counterparts.
- ▶ In education, fat students (from kindergarten right through to higher level university) are often the victims of bullying and are viewed negatively or treated less well by teachers and other educators.



# How this Shows up in Society

- ▶ In dating/relationships, fat people are seen as unattractive and disgusting – the sort who are only dated by people who ‘cannot do any better’, or by people who have a fat fetish, which is also seen in itself as unattractive and disgusting.
- ▶ In the fashion world, fat bodies are inadequately catered for.
- ▶ In medicine, fat patients are overwhelmingly viewed in a negative light by doctors, nurses, dieticians, etc. They are seen as lazy, unintelligent, weak-willed, and uncaring about their personal health. As a result they are frequently mistreated, misdiagnosed, and flat-out denied medical treatment.

# Weight Stigma & Fatphobia

Weight stigma in general refers to negative attitudes and behavior made towards fat people

Attitudes and behavior that mean fat people are not able to participate in everyday society the same way that thinner people are.

Fatphobia is a dislike of fat people.

# Fat and Weight Stigma



**Geoffrey Miller**

@matingmind



Dear obese PhD applicants: if you didn't have the willpower to stop eating carbs, you won't have the willpower to do a dissertation #truth

2:23pm - 2 Jun 13

# Fat & Weight Stigma

- ← Are more likely to be found guilty in court and subject to harsher sentencing
- Earn between \$9,000 and \$19,000 less than thin counterparts
- Experimental studies have found that when a résumé is accompanied by a picture or video of a person in a larger body (compared to an "average" sized person), the larger applicant is rated more negatively and is less likely to be hired.
- Less likely to be admitted to college and receive less educational financial support from their own families.
- Out of twenty possible sources of weight stigma, doctors were identified as the *second* most frequent source of bias reported
- One study found that 24% of nurses polled were “repulsed” by obese patients and 12% preferred not to touch them.
- Discrimination against people because of their body weight is not legally protected

# Fat Acceptance & Body Positivity



## What is body positivity, anyway?

“Body positivity is unlearning the idea that only certain bodies are worth acceptance and praise, and instead recognizing that *all* bodies are equally valuable. It's deciding what feels good and healthy for you personally, and letting other people do so for themselves. It's understanding that you deserve to live in your body without receiving the prejudice of others (whether that means rude comments, reduced economic opportunity, inadequate health care, or something else), and working toward a world where *no one's* body is the target of such bias.”



# Weight Stigma & the Environment

- ▶ Race, Class, “Obesity,” and Food Deserts
- ▶ Fatties cause Global Warming



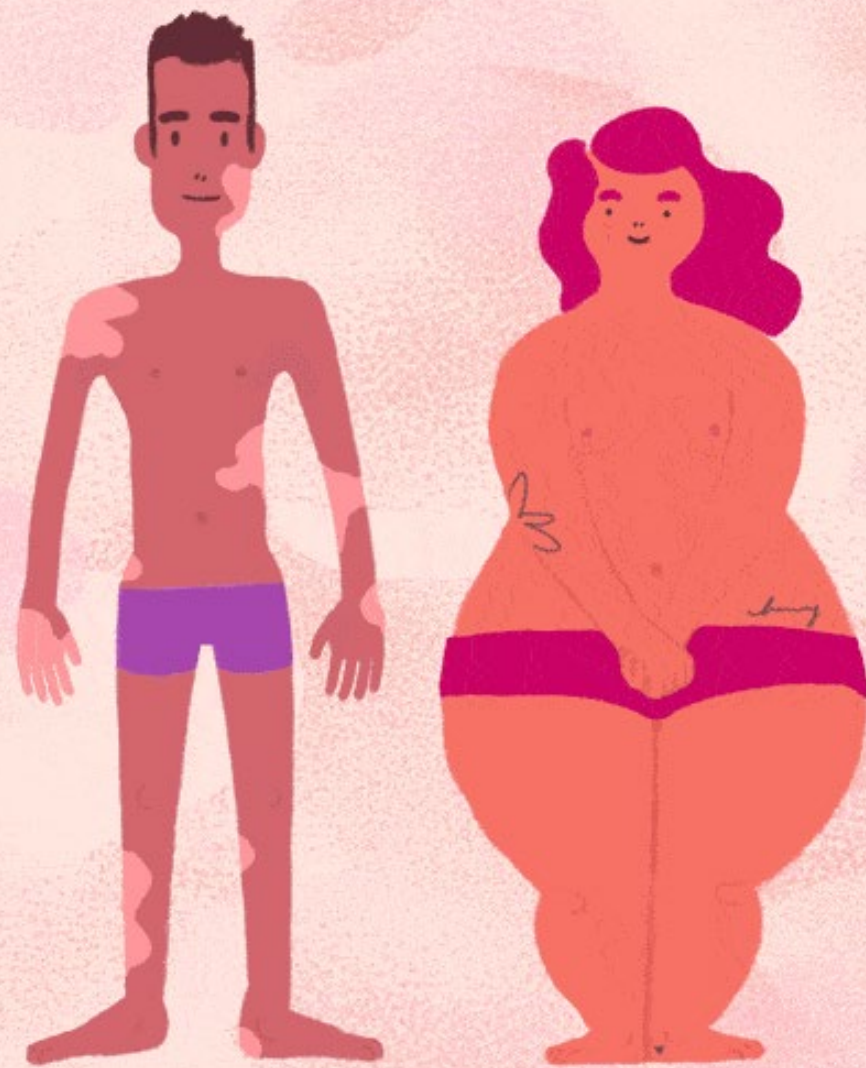
# **Implications for Teaching, Practice, Activism, & Research**

# What can we do?

- ▶ Be mindful of how you assign morality to choices you make about your diet.
- ▶ If you choose to exercise, focus on the non-physical and/or benefits.
- ▶ If you are anti-diet culture, you must also be anti-oppression in other ways. It's important to recognize the similarities and differences, and how the messages we receive reflect this.
- ▶ Think twice before you make judgements about yourself and others when it comes to food choice, exercise choice, and access different people have to those choices.



ALL OF THESE PEOPLE CAN BE BODY POSITIVE



Radical Self Love:  
Your Body Is not  
an Apology



IMAGINE IF  
WE OBSESSED  
ABOUT THE  
THINGS WE  
LOVED ABOUT  
OURSELVES.

# HAES Movement

“Health at every size is the new peace movement.”

It supports people of all sizes in addressing health directly by adopting healthy behaviors. It is an inclusive movement, recognizing that our social characteristics, such as our size, race, national origin, sexuality, gender, disability status, and other attributes, are assets, and acknowledges and challenges the structural and systemic forces that impinge on living well.

## 10 Guiding Principles of Intuitive Eating

1 Reject the diet mentality

2 Honor your hunger

3 Make peace with food

4 Challenge the food police

5 Respect your fullness

6 Respect your body

7 Discover satisfaction

8 Respect your body

9 Rewarding movement

10 Honor your health

# DIET MENTALITY vs INTUITIVE EATING

What can I eat?

Will this make me skinny?

How do I look?

I exercise so that I can eat.

I can eat whatever I want on my cheat day.

Food is the enemy but I also love to eat.

What do I want?

Will this nourish me?

How do I feel?

I eat so that I am able to exercise.

I can eat whatever I want everyday.

Food is just food.



# What can we do?



- ▶ Stop negative body talk! Be mindful of overly critical talk about yourself or your body.
- ▶ If you choose to exercise, focus on the non-physical and/or benefits.
- ▶ Don't comment on people's bodies
- ▶ Ditch the scale!

Actually, no. You don't have to do 1,085 burpees to "earn" that piece of your favorite holiday dessert. You don't have to punish yourself for eating food. Ever.

# What can we do?

- Talk to your clients about what is “normal eating” for them
- Consider a question “what was your relationship like with food and eating growing up?”
- Help clients relearn to trust their body
- Refer to resources; nutritionists, therapists, doctors etc. who specializes in eating disorders and adopt a non-diet or HAES approach or food and exercise

## You are in a Body-Positive Zone

*Please refrain from the following:*

- Diet /Weight Talk
- Body Policing (criticizing appearances)
- Food Shaming (judging food options or eating habits)
- Health or Concern Trolling (keep your health advice to yourself)
- Gender Policing (reinforcing gender norms)
- Ableism (discrimination against people with disabilities)
- Racist beauty standards



Embrace People of all Sizes, Abilities, and Gender Expressions

*Nalgona Positivity Pride*

# Disordered eating might also include:

- ▶ Self worth or self esteem based highly or even exclusively on body shape and weight
- ▶ A disturbance in the way one experiences their body i.e. a person who falls in a healthy weight range, but continues to feel that they are overweight
- ▶ Excessive or rigid exercise routine
- ▶ Obsessive calorie counting
- ▶ Anxiety or fear about certain foods or food groups
- ▶ A rigid approach to eating, such as only eating certain foods, inflexible meal times, refusal to eat in restaurants or outside of one's own home

# ORTHOREXIA

Although not formally recognized in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, awareness about orthorexia is on the rise. The term 'orthorexia' was coined in 1998 and means an obsession with proper or 'healthful' eating. Although being aware of and concerned with the nutritional quality of the food you eat isn't a problem in and of itself, people with orthorexia become so fixated on so-called 'healthy eating' that they actually damage their own well-being. Without formal diagnostic criteria, it's difficult to get an estimate on precisely how many people have orthorexia, and whether it's a stand-alone eating disorder, a type of existing eating disorders like anorexia, or a form of obsessive-compulsive disorder. Studies have shown that many individuals with orthorexia also have obsessive-compulsive disorder.

# Eating Disorders vs. Disordered Eating

- ▶ Normalized, non-disordered eating is when one mindfully consumes food when hungry and is able to stop when full. Additionally, they incorporate variety into their diet.
- ▶ Food does not interfere with your life; you're able to find food, comfortable at any restaurant, and there is no desire to change.
- Symptoms of disordered eating may include behavior commonly associated with *eating disorders*, such as food restriction, binge eating, purging (via self induced vomiting or excessive exercise, and use of diet pills and/ or laxatives)