

THE PROBLEM WITH DIET CULTURE:

**What Every Therapist, Health Professional,
Educator and Parent Needs To Know**



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WHAT IS DIET CULTURE?

- Prioritizes weight/body size over well-being
- Promises health, happiness and success to those who can conform
- Pressures people to pursue thinness and fear fat at all costs
- Presumes people have control over what they weigh
- Poses as health promoting even as it harms
- Promotes fat shaming and weight stigma

IN OTHER WORDS...

DIET CULTURE DEMANDS
THE PURSUIT OF WEIGHT LOSS

3 WAYS DIET CULTURE CAUSES HARM

#1: Diet culture leads to food angst, disordered eating and eating disorders

#2: Diet culture leads to body dissatisfaction, body shame and internalized weight stigma

#3: Diet culture promotes fat shaming and weight stigma

HERE'S HOW DIET CULTURE LOOKS



HERE'S HOW DIET CULTURE SOUNDS:

- I was bad today: I ate too many carbs.
- I'm being good today, so I can't eat dessert.
- You look great – have you lost weight?
- I look too fat in this dress.
- Can you believe how she's let herself go?
- I wish I looked like you in my jeans.
- I'm trying to be healthy, so no more (fill in the blank).

AND THIS TOO:

- When I lose weight, I'll feel more confident.
- I have to lose weight to be healthy.
- I need to exercise to make up for the overeating I did yesterday.
- Eating less is just a matter of willpower.
- I feel better when I'm thinner.
- I'm ashamed of my overeating and my weight.

WHAT MESSAGES ARE **YOU** GIVING?



When it comes to dieting, food and weight, what we say, what we do, and even what we think affects what we communicate to our clients, our peers, and our children.

#1: DIET CULTURE CAUSES HARM: FOOD

Food is primarily meant to be a source of nourishment and pleasure. Eating shouldn't be a constant cause of worry about what to eat and not to eat – and the prescription keeps changing.

Disordered eating can include:

- skipping meals
- over-exercising
- fasting, eliminating food groups (without a medical reason)
- disconnection from hunger/fullness
- overeating
- rigidity (orthorexia)
- dieting
- guilt



WHAT WE KNOW

- People who diet are at a significantly greater risk of developing an eating disorder.
- The vast majority of people who go on a diet will gain back the weight, and one-third to two-thirds end up higher than their pre-diet weight. (Mann, American Psychologist, 2007)
- Adolescents using weight control behaviors are at 3 times greater risk for weight gain, binge eating and other eating disorders compared to peers not using weight control behaviors regardless of initial pre-diet weight. (Neumark-Sztainer, Journal of the American Dietetic Association 2006)
- The vast majority of dieters, whose weight fluctuates throughout their adult lives, have a greater risk of health problems such as cardiovascular disease. (Lissner, L. N, New England Journal of Medicine 1991)

#2) DIET CULTURE CAUSES HARM: BODY IMAGE

A positive body image occurs when a person is able to accept, appreciate, and respect their body. It is not contingent on a particular body size.

Body image problems can include:

- Self-criticism about weight and shape
- Frequent weighing on the scale
- Constant comparing of body size
- Putting off goals until weight is lost
- Feeling ashamed to be seen in public
- Preoccupation with body size/fear of fat



WHAT WE KNOW

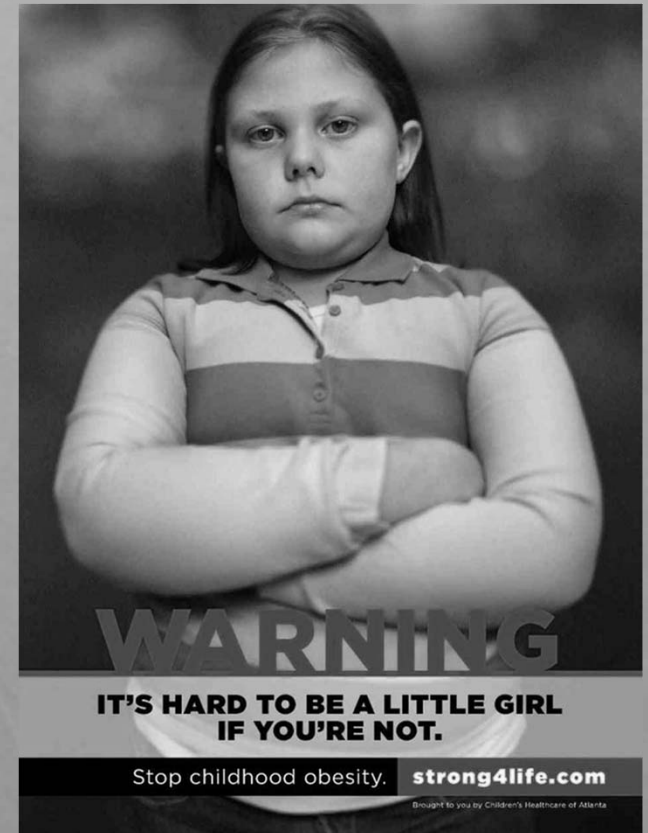
- 69% of girls in one study said that magazine models influence their idea of the perfect body shape.
- Exposure to the “ideal” body images has been found to lower women's satisfaction with their own attractiveness.
- Girls who were already dissatisfied with their bodies showed more dieting, anxiety, and bulimic symptoms after prolonged exposure to fashion and advertising images in a teen girl magazine. (Eating Disorders: Body Image and Advertising 2008)
- High school girls who diet are 4 times as likely to gain weight than their non-dieting counterparts regardless of beginning weight. (E. Stice, Journal of Consulting Psychology, 1999)
- In every weight category, women who are unhappy with their weight have poorer health outcomes, e.g. higher blood pressure and fasting glucose levels than women who are fine with their bodies. (C.E. Blake, Journal of Obesity, 2013)

#3) DIET CULTURE CAUSES HARM: WEIGHT STIGMA

Health is much broader than a number on the scale. Every body deserves to be treated with respect.

Weight stigma can include:

- assuming someone should lose weight
- inadequate medical care for higher weight people
- “obesity” prevention programs
- fat jokes
- blaming health costs on “obesity”
- media messages that promote thinner bodies



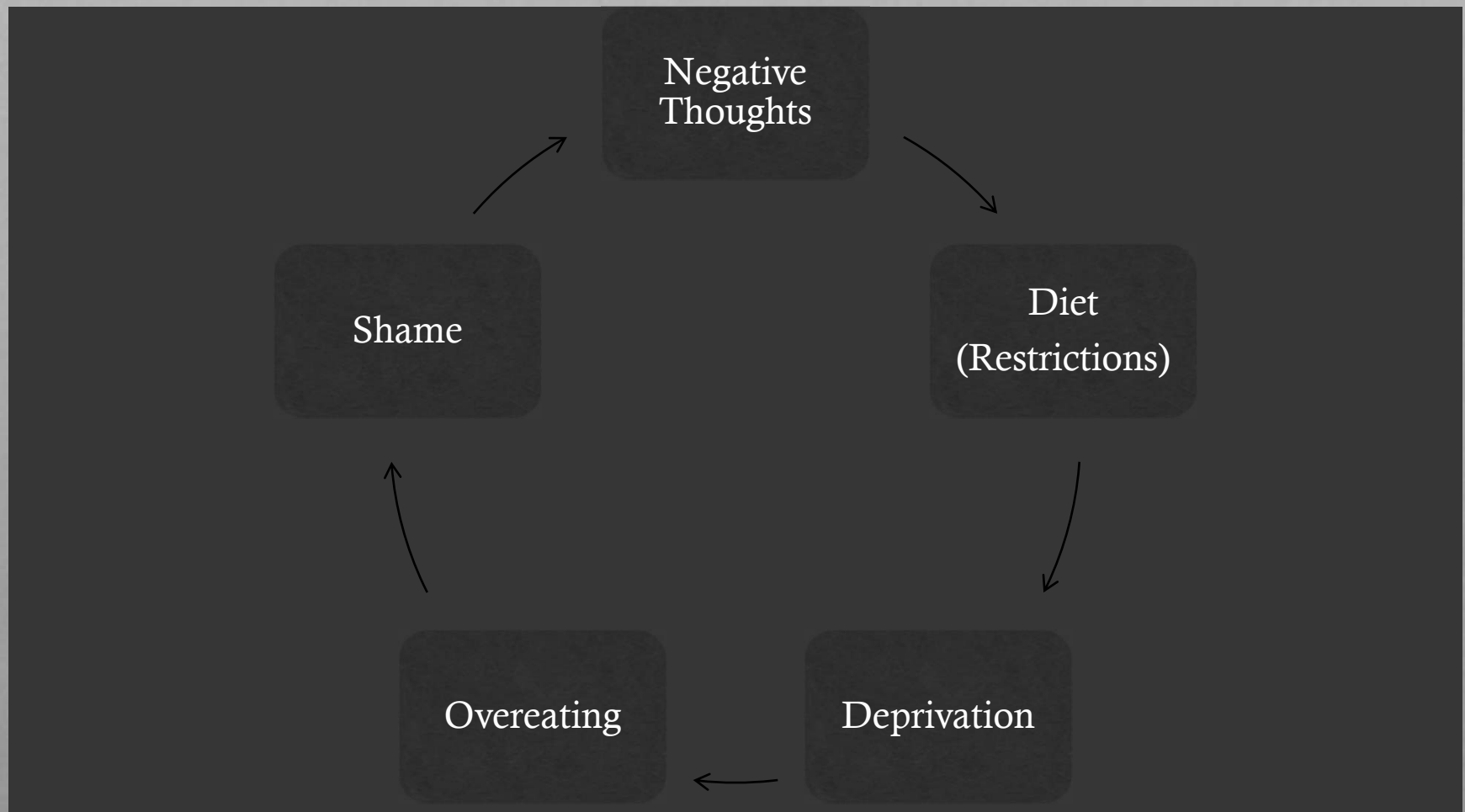
WHAT WE KNOW

- Weight bullying is the most common form of teasing and bullying in school settings compared to race, ethnicity, sexual preference, physical disability and religion. Adverse outcomes include low self-esteem depression, suicidal ideation, poor body image, maladaptive eating behaviors, etc. (Puhl, Journal of School Health 2011)
- “In a study of 400 doctors, one of every three listed obesity as a condition to which they responded negatively...They associated [it] with noncompliance, hostility, dishonesty, and poor hygiene.” (Weight Bias: A Social Justice Issue Policy Brief (2012) Yale Rudd Center)
- “Psychologists ascribe more pathology, more negative and severe symptoms and worse prognosis to obese patients compared to thinner patients presenting identical psychological profiles.” (Weight Bias: A Social Justice Issue Policy Brief (2012) Yale Rudd Center)
- Exposure to weight stigma and negative body image among “obese” people explains some of the weight-associated health problems that have been attributed to higher body weights alone. (Muennig, BMC Public Health, 2008)

THE PROBLEM WITH DIET CULTURE:

Shame

THE DIET-BINGE CYCLE



THE ROLE OF SHAME

- Connection gives life meaning
- Shame is a fear of disconnection
- Is there something about me that, if people know or see it, I will not be worthy of connection
- Shame thrives on secrecy, silence and judgment.

(From Brene Brown, The Power of Vulnerability, TEDx 2010)



3 STEPS TOWARD ENDING DIET CULTURE

#1: Move from disordered eating to attuned/intuitive eating.

#2: Move from body shame to body acceptance, appreciation and respect.

#3: Move from weight stigma to size diversity, inclusivity, and respect for all bodies



ENDING DIET CULTURE: MAKING PEACE WITH FOOD

Diet culture leads to a preoccupation with food and often results in unhealthy eating behaviors.

What would it be like for people to develop a healthy and peaceful relationship with food?

THE ANTIDOTE TO DIETING: ATTUNED/INTUITIVE EATING

DIET MENTALITY

External Rules

Rigid

Deprived

Guilt

Preoccupied

Weight Loss

Shame

Judgment

Oppressed

In Control

ATTUNED EATING

Internal Cues

Flexible

Satisfied

Pleasure

Empowered

Nourishment

Compassion

Acceptance

Freedom

In Charge



THREE STEPS OF ATTUNED/INTUITIVE EATING

- 1) Do you know when you're hungry?
- 2) Do you eat what you're hungry for, choosing from a wide variety of foods?
- 3) Do you stop when eating when you're full/satisfied?



RECONNECTING: WHEN TO EAT

- 1) Starving
- 2) Very Hungry
- 3) Hungry
- 4) Somewhat Hungry
- 5) Not Hungry/Not Full
- 6) Somewhat Full
- 7) Full
- 8 Very Full
- 9) Stuffed



(From Beyond a Shadow of a Diet, 2nd edition, p. 82)

RECONNECTING: WHAT TO EAT

- Hot or Cold
- Crunchy or Soft
- Sweet or Savory
- Spicy or Bland
- Protein, Carb, Fat

(From Beyond a Shadow of a Diet

2nd edition, p. 90)



EATING STYLES

- Vegetarian
- Vegan
- Kosher
- Health Concerns
- Etc.!



RECONNECTING: HOW MUCH TO EAT

Remember to AIM

Attunement

Intention

Mindfulness



(From Beyond a Shadow of a Diet, 2nd edition, p. 108)

ATTUNED EATING LEADS TO ATTUNED LIVING

- I have needs
- My needs are specific
- My needs can be filled



FOOD AND EMOTIONAL REGULATION

Feelings: sad, lonely, angry, bored, happy, overwhelmed,



Functions: soothe, distract, comfort, numb, calm

THE TRANSLATION OF FEELINGS INTO DIET CULTURE TALK

It feels like this:

Anger-----eat

It happens like this:

Anger-----→unable to be with uncomfortable

feelings-----→eat-----→yell-----→resolve to lose weight

ENDING DIET CULTURE: BODY CONFIDENCE

Diet Culture keeps people at war with their bodies.

What happens when people accept, appreciate and respect their bodies?

BODY IMAGE STRATEGIES

Stop Negative Talk. Practice Compassion. Reject Internalized Weight Stigma.

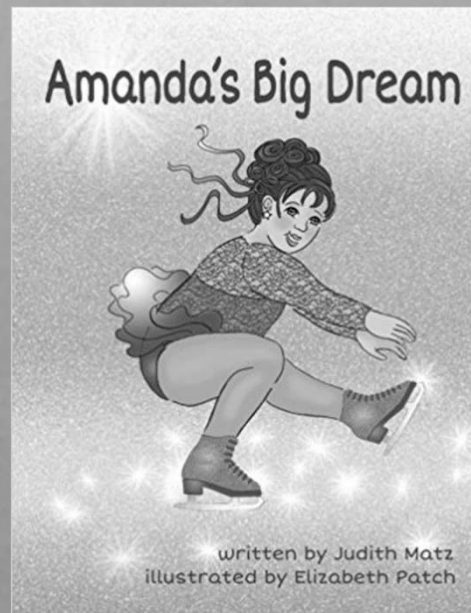
- 24 Hours of Bad Body Thoughts
- If yelling made me thin...
- Computer Exercise

Accept. Appreciate. Respect.



OUR NEXT GENERATION

- “Am I fat?”
- Weight is a characteristic, not a behavior
- What’s good for larger kids is good for thinner kids, and vice a versa.



DIET CULTURE: SIZE DIVERSITY

Diet culture leads to oppression, discrimination and shaming based on body size.

What would happen if we treated every body with respect and let go of judgments based on body size?

GRETCHEN'S STORY

- I've quit dieting.
- I'm eating when I'm hungry and stopping when I'm full, choosing from a wide variety of foods.
- I practice other self-care behaviors that I choose to do.

And then I have to walk back out into the world where:



CHALLENGING WEIGHT STIGMA

- There's constant talk about dieting
- There's constant talk about weight
- There constant judgment about body size
- There's constant assumptions based on body size



EXAMINE YOUR OWN BELIEFS



WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?

THIN

happy

successful

sexy

exercise

healthy

confident

FAT

lazy

couch potato

unhealthy

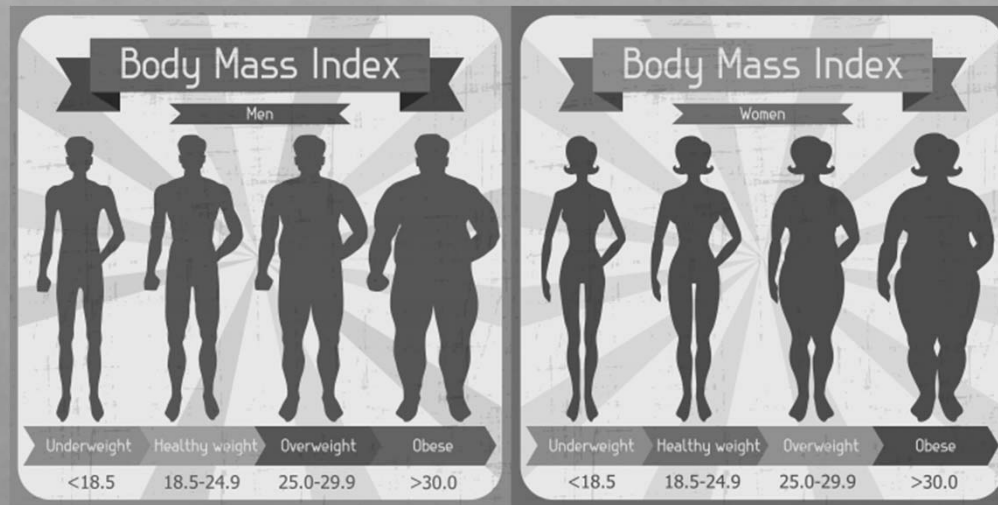
stupid

miserable

out of control

WEIGHT AND MORTALITY

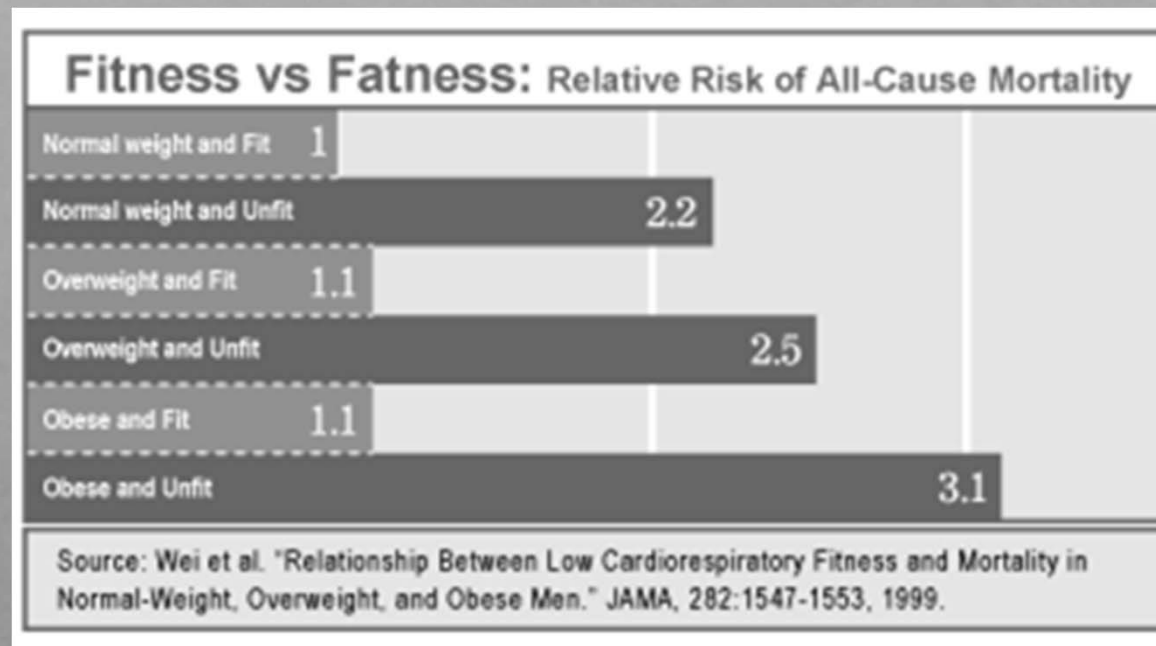
- “Overweight” — lowest mortality
- “Normal” weight and lower end of “obesity” = same risk
- “Obesity” — slightly higher
- “Underweight” — highest mortality



(Centers for Disease Control, 2013/Flegal, et. al. JAMA)

WEIGHT AND HEALTH

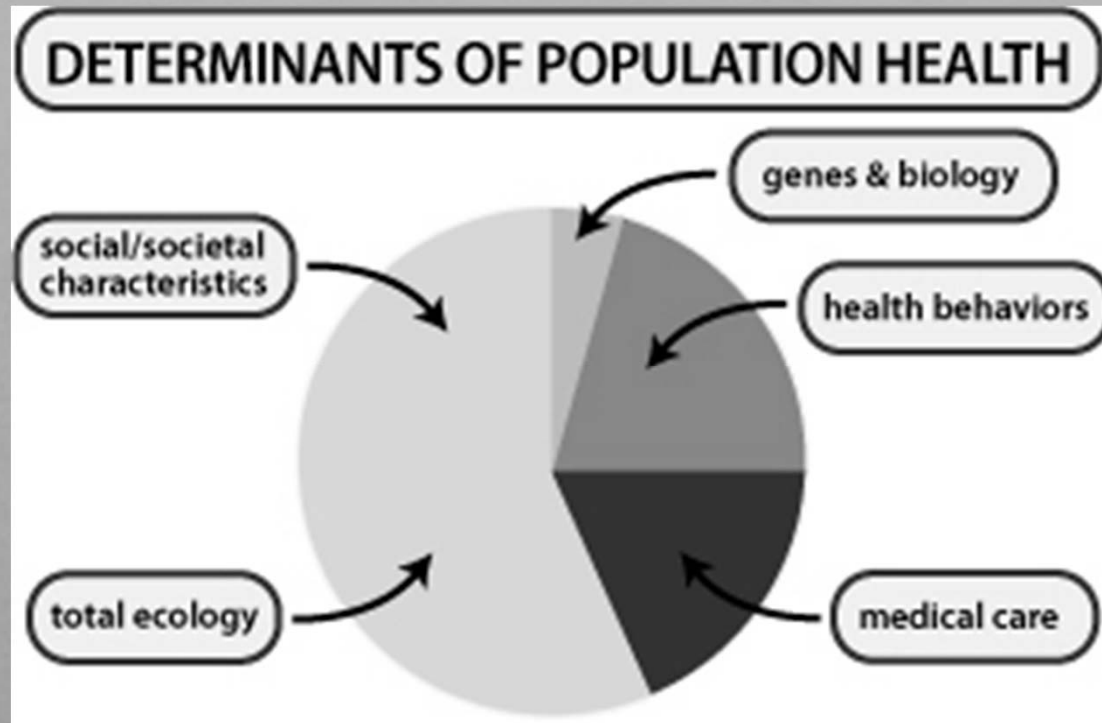
Men who are fit and “obese” have half the death rate of men who are unfit and “thin.”



CORRLEATION VS CAUSATION



SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH



(Tarlov, A.R. (1999) Public Policy Frameworks for Improving Population Health)

“What if your zip code has more of an affect on your health than your weight?” (Powell, T. et. al. 2015, Journal of Preventive Medicine)

INTERSECTING IDENTITIES



THIN PRIVILEGE

What are some examples of unearned advantages that come from being “thin” in our culture?



THE HEALTH AT EVERY SIZE® (HAES) FRAMEWORK

- Research Based
- Weight Inclusive
- Wellness Beyond Weight
- Social Justice Framework

**BECOME A HEALTH AT EVERY SIZE (HAES)
INFORMED PROFESSIONAL**

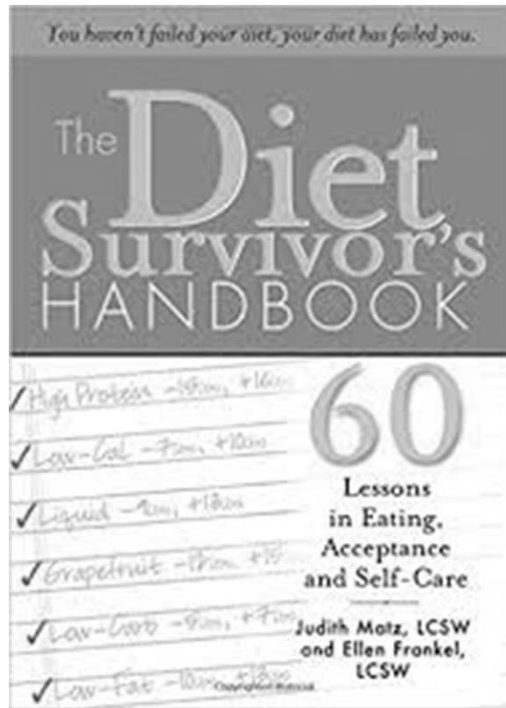
CHANGING THE CONVERSATION ABOUT DIETING, FOOD AND WEIGHT



Let's stop making diet talk and fat-shaming talk normative.

WE ARE THE CULTURE

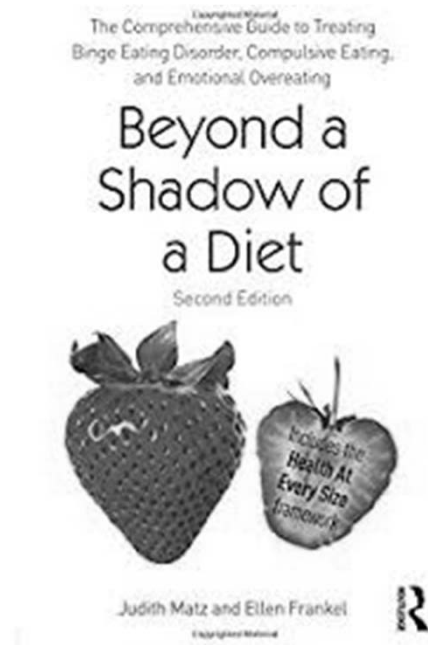
Don't blame yourself or others when diets fail.



“You haven’t failed your diet; your diet has failed you.”

WE ARE THE CULTURE

Learn more about attuned/intuitive eating – focus on eating for nourishment and pleasure rather than restrictive eating.



Teach your clients how to work their way out of the diet-binge cycle.

WE ARE THE CULTURE

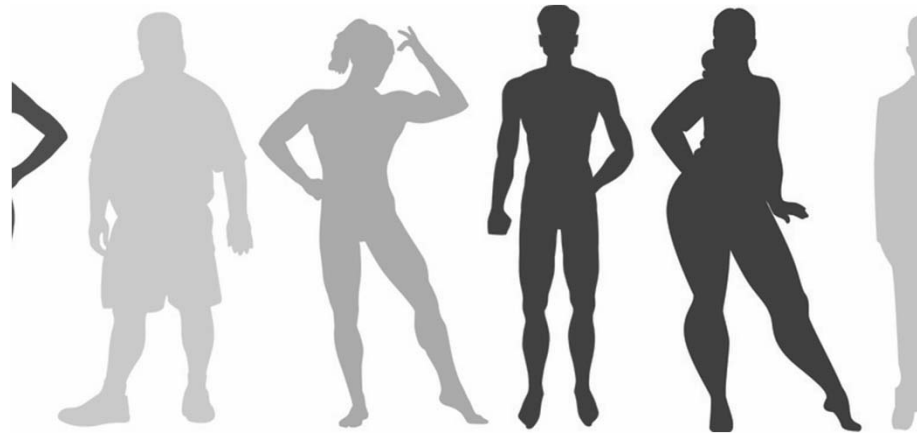
Practice and encourage positive, sustainable behaviors:



Health is much broader than a number on the scale! Every body gets to pursue health to the degree they choose, given what's accessible to them.

WE ARE THE CULTURE

Challenge your own internalized weight bias



To take the Weight Implicit Association Test, go to Project Implicit
<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit>.

Register for the Project Implicit Social Attitudes tests, and click on
Weight IAT.

WE ARE THE CULTURE

Educate yourself about weight and health:



Weight science: Evaluating the evidence for a paradigm shift (Linda Bacon & Lucy Aphramor) *Nutrition Journal*, 2011

The weight-inclusive versus weight-normative approach to health: Evaluating the evidence for prioritizing well-being over weight loss (Tracy Tylka et. al.) *Journal of Obesity*, 2014)

WE ARE THE CULTURE

Stop engaging in diet and fat shaming talk:



Find community for yourself and your clients!

HERE'S HOW THAT SOUNDS:

- I love your new scarf.
- That tasted delicious and felt just right in my body.
- No thanks, I'm not hungry.
- It felt so good to take a walk today.
- My jeans don't fit anymore. Time to go shopping.
- I've decided that making sure I get more sleep will be good for my health.

AND THIS TOO:

- I feel beautiful in this dress.
- That joke about weight isn't funny to me.
- If we're going to celebrate diversity, let's add size diversity to our list.
- As I've gotten older, I've noticed my body is changing. Pretty amazing all of the things it's done for me!
- There's so many interesting things to talk about other than dieting and weight. Tell me about...

A COMPLETE LIST OF RESOURCES
AND LINKS IS AVAILABLE AT:

<https://goo.gl/JTFxDX>

DISMANTLING DIET CULTURE

Be gentle with yourself. Stay compassionate. But don't stay complicit. Do the work—for your clients, your children, yourself.



YOU ARE THE PEBBLE



You are the pebble that creates the ripples that can help to dismantle diet culture. What is one thing you will do after watching today to learn more or to take action?