Emerging Trends in Eating Disorders and Body Image

Recovery As Rebellion- The Body Liberation Movement

Lib-er-a-tion

Noun

- The act of setting someone free from imprisonment, slavery, or oppression; release

"The political dissidents were liberated"

- Freedom from limits on thought or behavior

"The struggle for women's liberation"

Why Do We Need Body Liberation?

- Discrimination in employment
- Discrimination in healthcare
- Internalized bias
- Diet culture (which frames "fat" as shameful.)

Body Discrimination in Employment

- Studies show that discrimination increases with BMI (Pearl 2018.)
- People of size are stigmatized as "lazy, unmotivated, unintelligent, lacking willpower." May be passed over for jobs or promotions.
- According to study women who were 6.3kg heavier earned $1867 less per year on average than their thinner counterparts of the same height.
- (Higgs 2019)

Employment, cont.

- Body size is frequently not addressed in diversity trainings.
- Weight bias is still largely considered acceptable.
- People of size are often "blamed" for their size.

Discrimination in Healthcare

Spotlight Action: End Weight Bias in Healthcare

69% of patients report that physicians are a source of weight bias

52% of patients report that they have been stigmatized on multiple visits

2nd Physicians are the second highest source of weight bias

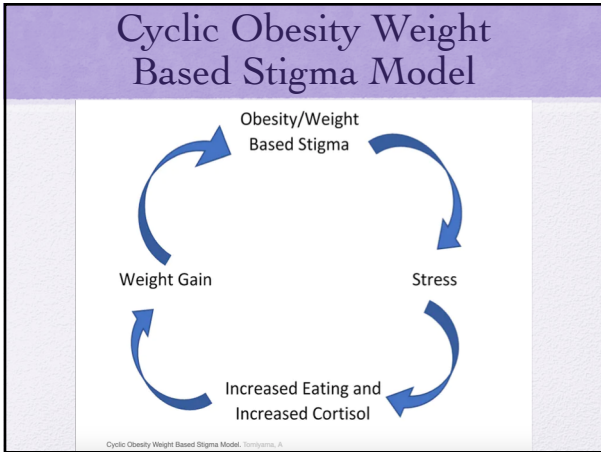**31%** of nurses would prefer not to treat patients with obesity

24% of nurses agreed that patients with obesity "repulsed them"

12% of nurses would prefer "not to touch" patients with obesity

Discrimination in Healthcare

- Changes in eating and physical activity, such as unhealthy eating behaviors, binge eating disorder, and lower motivation for exercise.

- Physiological reactions including increased blood pressure, blood sugar, and levels of the stress hormone cortisol.

- Reduced engagement with health care services, including less trust of health care providers and poor adherence to treatment.

- Effects on psychological health and distress, including depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and suicidal tendency.

- Long-term health effects including more advanced and poorly controlled chronic disease, and low health-related quality of life.

(Stanford et al.)

Cyclic Obesity Weight Based Stigma Model

Obesity/Weight Based Stigma

Weight Gain

Stress

Increased Eating and Increased Cortisol

Cyclic Obesity Weight Based Stigma Model. Tomiyama, A.

Internalized Bias

- Individuals of size encounter stigma and bias in almost all areas of life.

- Internalized bias has been linked with a wide range of negative health outcomes, including mood disorders, psychological distress, worse body image, lower self-esteem, poorer health-related quality of life, metabolic dysfunction, disordered eating, avoidance of exercise, and social isolation and experiential avoidance.

(Pearl and Puhl 2018)

This affects everyone

- Larger individuals bear the brunt of weight discrimination in our society but it affects all of us regardless of size. From childhood we are taught that thin = healthy and fat = unhealthy.

- Fear of fat fuels destructive behavior ranging from mild preoccupation to full on eating disorders. Diet culture thrives on our fear of fat.

- 66% rise in weight-related discrimination in the past 10 years (Puhl, et al 2018.)

Diet Culture

- Multi-billion dollar industry feeding off of our insecurity and self-loathing.

- Recently re-branded as the "wellness" industry:

- "Clean eating," detoxes, cleanses, the overuse of elimination diets, carb restriction, gluten phobia, "ancestral" diets, and performative health all fall under the umbrella of The Wellness Diet. The weight-stigma aspect of diet culture may be de-emphasized in some iterations of The Wellness Diet, but the moralization and demonization of food is front and center. (Harrison 2019)

Diet Culture

WHAT IS DIET CULTURE?

A SOCIETY THAT FOCUSES ON AND VALUES WEIGHT, SHAPE, AND SIZE OVER HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

EXAMPLES OF DIET CULTURE:

1 FEELING LIKE YOU CAN'T ESCAPE CONVERSATIONS ABOUT WEIGHT, DIETS, GOOD/BAD FOODS, CUTTING CARBS, DETOXING, CLEANSING, CALORIES, MACROS, ETC.

2 EXERCISE IS ADVERTISED AS A MODE FOR WEIGHT LOSS, A MEANS TO BECOME MORE ATTRACTIVE, OR PUNISHMENT FOR EATING

3 WEIGHT LOSS CHALLENGES IN WORKPLACES, AMONGST FAMILY MEMBERS, OR FRIENDS

4 A HEALTHCARE PROVIDER THAT FOCUSES ON BMI AND OVERLOOKS ASSESSING OTHER HEALTH MARKERS, FITNESS LEVEL, MOBILITY, PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING

5 BEFORE-AND-AFTER PHOTOS, THIN IDEALS, FIT IDEALS. ANYTHING THAT GENERATES A FEAR OF FAT OR POSITIONS LARGE AS LESS VALUABLE

6 PRAISING PEOPLE FOR VIGILANT EATING AND/OR WEIGHT LOSS

Diets Don't Work

- UCLA meta-analysis of 31 long-term studies proved definitively that long-term weight loss is unsustainable for the majority of people.

- Diets also fail to produce notable health benefits unrelated to weight.

- Weight cycling is unhealthy.

- Most people would be better off not dieting at all.

---

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

@nourishingbitsandbites

Rejecting Diet Culture

- Step one of many steps.

- Requires a change in language, behaviors, as well as deeply held (and sometimes unconscious) beliefs.

- Takes practice and dedication, helps to have social support (might have to help educate friends and family.)

You can shop for clothing in any store

Your body fits in between restaurant tables

Your doctor doesn't blame all your symptoms on your weight

Gatewell

People don't mock/ patronize you when you exercise

Examples of thin privilege

Airplane seats fit you and your seatmates don't grimace when you board

People don't judge your food choices

BP cuffs, hospital gowns, and MRI machines fit your body

Chairs in public spaces fit and support your body

Rejecting the Diet Mentality

- Mindset: acknowledging internalized fatphobia and calling it out (ex. judging people of size, fearing weight gain, being an uncritical consumer of fashion magazines, etc.)

- Language: stop equating fat with lazy/ugly, ex. "you're not fat! You're beautiful!" Challenging fatphobic comments.

- Behavior: stop playing along with diet/wellness culture mob mentality (ex. Doing Whole30 in January, "detoxes/cleanses, fad diets, etc.)

You can't think your way into right acting but you can act your way into right thinking

- Being fat is not the worst thing that can happen to a person.

- Being fat is not always (or even often) associated with poor health.

- Participating in sizeism perpetuates a social ill that harms everyone.

- When individuals refuse to play along, diet culture loses its power.

Body Positivity

- Victorian Dress Reform (1850s-1890s)
  - Rejected use of corsets to achieve unrealistic body ideals
  - Pushed for women's right to wear pants
  - Part of the first wave of feminism

First Wave

- 1967 "Fat-In" held at Central Park, led by radio host Steven Post

- 1969 formation of the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance

- Beginning of the Health At Every Size (HAES) movement

Principles of Health At Every Size®

1. **Weight inclusivity:** Accepting and respecting the diversity of body shapes and sizes
2. **Health enhancement:** Improving access to information & services; attending to physical, spiritual, social, economic, emotional, & other needs
3. **Respectful care:** Owning biases, ending weight stigma & discrimination
4. **Eating for well-being:** Promoting eating in a manner which balances individual nutritional needs, hunger, satiety, nutritional needs, and pleasure
5. **Life-enhancing movement:** Promoting individually appropriate, enjoyable, life-enhancing physical activity, rather than exercise that is focused on a goal of weight loss

Second Wave

- 1990s

- Exercise classes specifically for people of size (ex. Yoga for Round Bodies, Making Waves, etc.)

- Programs like these were mostly overshadowed by the diet industry (the 90s were prime time for fad diets!)

Third Wave and shift to Body Liberation

- Prominent presence in social media

- Challenges not only weight stigma but also other unrealistic body standards: smooth, blemish-free skin, an absence of scars or cellulite, etc.

- Also addresses greater social issues such as ableism, light-skin privilege, gender binary, etc.

Cwynar-Horta (2016)

Inclusivity

Body Liberation Helps Everyone

- Positive body image is linked to greater emotional, social, and psychological well-being (Swami, et al).

- Also positively associated with health-seeking behaviors, intuitive eating and physical activity (Andrew et al., 2016).

- It has even been found that body appreciation may play a protective role against the negative impacts of media use (Andrew et al., 2015; Halliwell, 2013).

- An experimental study of Cohen et al. (2019) showed that body positive content on Instagram can improve positive mood, body satisfaction and body appreciation.

Body positive content on Instagram

Other great resources

- Food Psych podcast with Christy Harrison and the Anti-Diet book

- Intuitive Eating (book and workbook)

- Body Kindness by Rebecca Scritchfield

- The Body is Not an Apology by Sonya Renee Taylor

- The Beauty Myth by Naomi Wolf

Body Liberation and Eating Disorder recovery

- The Beauty Myth, Naomi Wolf
  - Advertisers don't sell products, they sell our own unhappiness back to us.
  - We will buy anything when we feel inferior.
  - An entire industry is built on our misery.
  - This should make you angry.
  - Anger is a motivating emotion; shame is de-motivating.

Fijian Study

- 1995-1998

- Introduction of Western television into traditional society saw an immediate and significant uptick in eating disorders (from almost 0 to 11.3%.)

- Fijian girls began to see themselves as "poor and fat." (Becker 1996)

Anger + Contribution

- Using the motivating emotion of anger and the DBT skill of contribution, eating disorder clients can "get out of their own heads" and find a path toward recovery.

- Validating that our society has an eating disorder, and only total rejection of this can lead to long-lasting recovery.

- Empowering family and friends to not only support recovery but to contribute to social change as well.

Preventing Eating Disorders

- Body liberation not only empowers recovery but creates a social environment that protects against eating disorders.

- Effect change within smaller social systems and then expand.

- "How can I be part of the change I want to see?"

In conclusion…

RIOT DON'T DIET