

The Weight of Injustice

Exploring the Intersectionality of Fatphobia, Racism,
and Mental Health

Stephanie M. Campbell, PhD

Hawai'i DOH / Child & Adolescent Mental Health Division

April 14th, 2023



Disclaimer and Funding Statement

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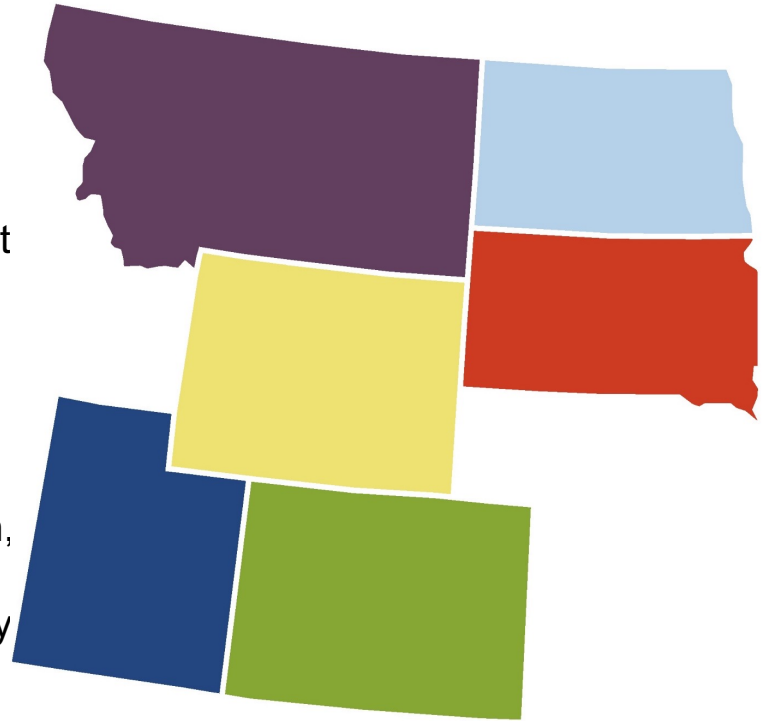
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The Mountain Plains Mental Health Technology Transfer Center

The Mountain Plains Mental Health Technology Transfer Center (Mountain Plains MHTTC) provides training and technical assistance to individuals who serve persons with mental health concerns throughout Region 8 (Colorado, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah and Wyoming).

We belong to the Technology Transfer Center (TTC) Network, a national network of training and technical assistance centers serving the needs of mental health, substance use and prevention providers. The work of the TTC Network is under a cooperative agreement by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration (SAMHSA).



Land Acknowledgement Statement

Today, the University of North Dakota rests on the ancestral lands of the Pembina and Red Lake Bands of Ojibwe and the Dakota Oyate - presently existing as composite parts of the Red Lake, Turtle Mountain, White Earth Bands, and the Dakota Tribes of Minnesota and North Dakota. We acknowledge the people who resided here for generations and recognize that the spirit of the Ojibwe and Oyate people permeates this land. As a university community, we will continue to build upon our relations with the First Nations of the State of North Dakota - the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nation, Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate Nation, Spirit Lake Nation, Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, and Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians.



The MHTTC Network uses affirming, respectful and recovery-oriented language in all activities. That language is:

STRENGTHS-BASED
AND HOPEFUL

INCLUSIVE AND
ACCEPTING OF
DIVERSE CULTURES,
GENDERS,
PERSPECTIVES,
AND EXPERIENCES

HEALING-CENTERED AND
TRAUMA-RESPONSIVE

INVITING TO INDIVIDUALS
PARTICIPATING IN THEIR
OWN JOURNEYS

PERSON-FIRST AND
FREE OF LABELS

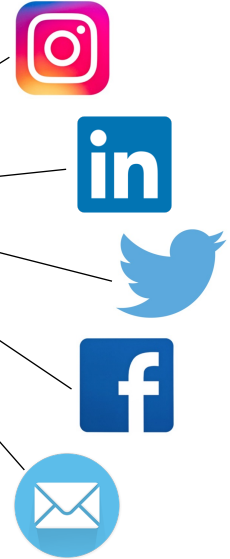
NON-JUDGMENTAL AND
AVOIDING ASSUMPTIONS

RESPECTFUL, CLEAR
AND UNDERSTANDABLE

CONSISTENT WITH
OUR ACTIONS,
POLICIES, AND PRODUCTS

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The **Weight** Of Injustice

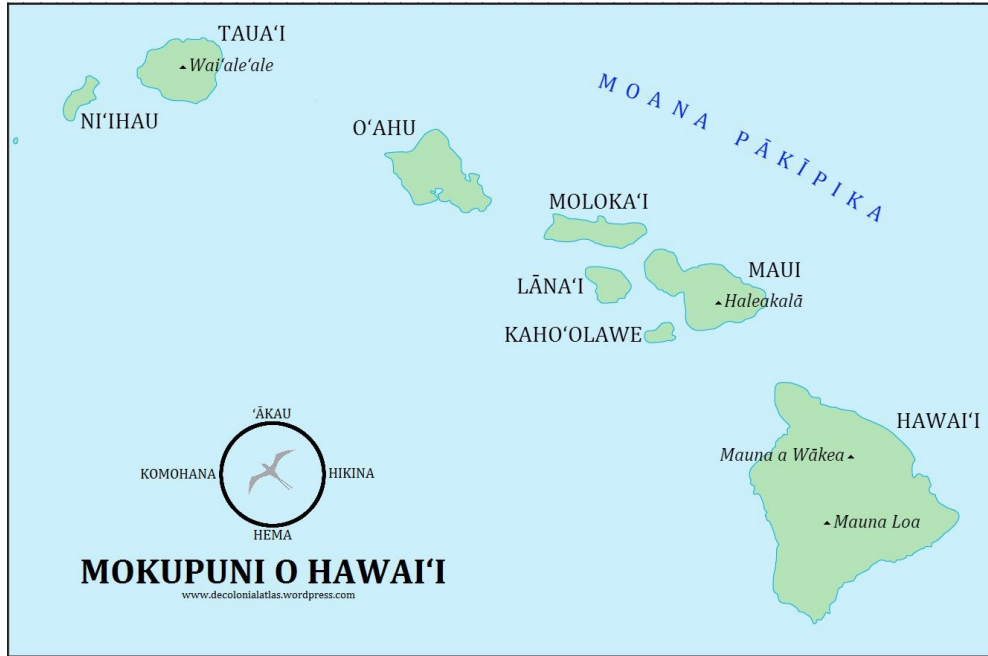
Exploring the
Intersectionality of
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April 2023
MHTTC
Mountain Plains

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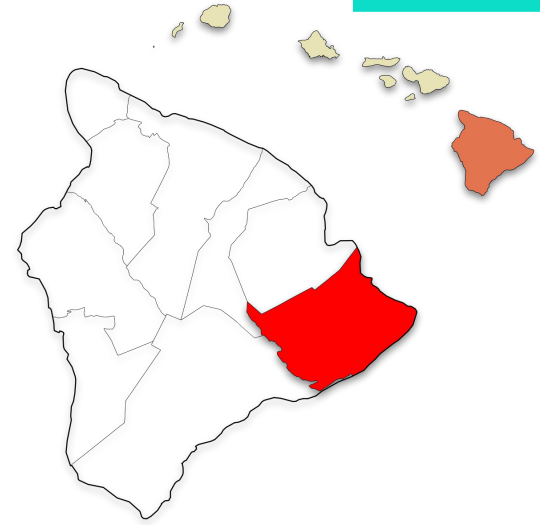
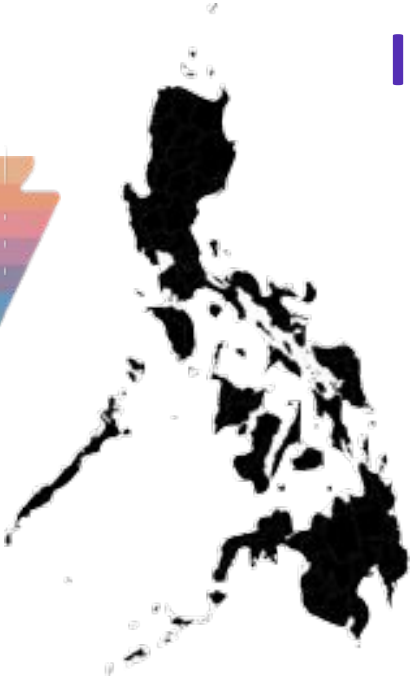
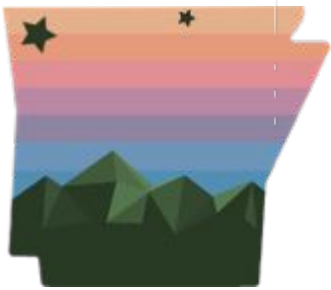


Agenda

1. Introduction
2. Definitions
3. Mechanisms of fatphobia
 - a. Racial origins
 - b. What sustains bias
4. Issues with BMI & “health”
5. Weight stigma & youth
6. Actionable steps



Introduction



School Psychology
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON






REQUEST: gentleness with self & others

**Shame, blame, and guilt
are barriers to equity.**

[Shelby Gordon @fit.flexible.fluid]

Discussing issues related to body image or weight can be emotional & challenging. I ask that you approach disagreement with curiosity.



The background is a solid purple color. In the top-left corner, there is a quarter-circle shape divided into three segments: white, red, and light purple. Below this, on the left side, is a teal square partially overlapping a light purple square. On the right side, there is a series of teal steps or a staircase shape, with a red square and a light purple square at the bottom right.

REFLECT

+

DISCUSS



Take 2 minutes to consider and quickwrite:
**How have ideas about weight and bodies
affected you personally and/or professionally?**

**What is your prior exposure to weight bias,
fatphobia, and/or anti-fat attitudes?**

**What narratives have you been taught
about weight throughout life?**

**What narratives might be salient
to the students you serve?**



Matt Manalo

@mattmanalo



If you're Filipino with big legs, those are the legs that killed Magellan. Don't forget.

10:03 PM · Apr 5, 2021 from Houston, TX · Twitter for iPhone

1,269 Retweets **291** Quote Tweets **8,106** Likes



Matt Manalo @mattmanalo · Apr 5



Replying to [@mattmanalo](#)

I didn't expect this type of big leg solidarity 🦵👊❤️





The Why

- You = someBODY with a body
- You work with folx with bodies
- As with other areas of implicit bias, dismantling prejudice requires education and work
- Mental health professionals
 - ACTIVELY fighting bias is critical

Social Justice Imperative

have the **courage to differ** in opinion from others and take personal **responsibility for addressing social justice issues** with colleagues

[p. 460, Shriberg et al. 2008]

“Social justice is both a **process** and a **goal** that requires action.

School psychologists *work to ensure* the protection of the educational rights, opportunities, and well-being of

all children,

especially those whose voices have been **muted**, identities **obscured**, or needs **ignored**.”

[adopted by NASP Board of Directors, April 2017]

Definitions

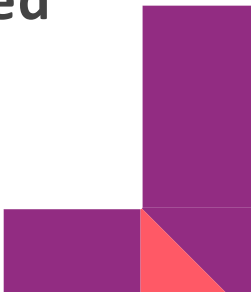


racism

prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against someone of a particular race **based on the belief** that one's own (or a certain) race is superior

weight bias/stigma

social **devaluation & denigration** of individuals **perceived** to carry excess weight





body image

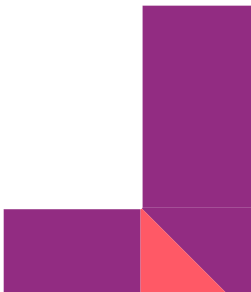
feelings, attitudes, perceptions, thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors **related to one's body**

body diversity

truthful **heterogeneity** of physical human forms

weight nonconformity

deviation from dominant **sociocultural ideal** of body size; usually a higher weight





weight nonconformity

“fat” as a neutral descriptor

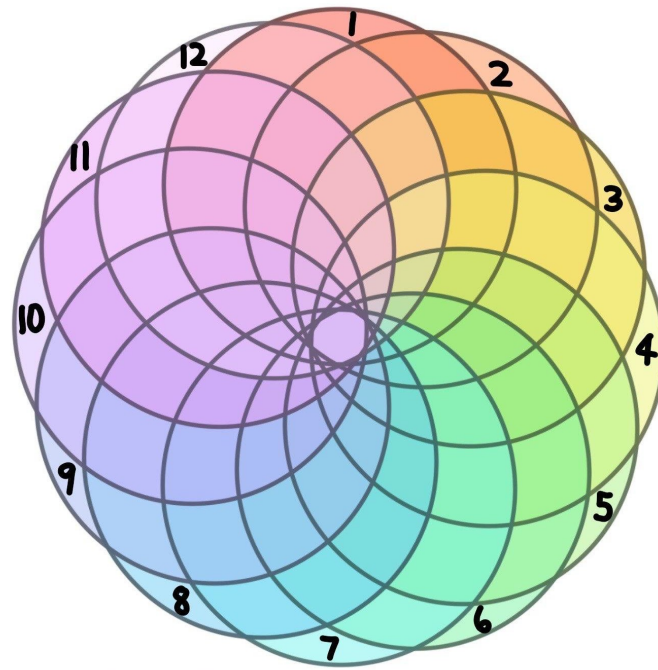
Some reasons scholars and activists use the term:

- to **reclaim** the word
- to **expunge** the oft-associated shame
 - take the power from something traditionally used to bully
 - akin to “queer”
- to **reinforce** it as a term of identity and pride

[Campbell, 2021; Cooper, 2010; Nutter et al., 2018]

History

INTERSECTIONALITY



- 1 Race
- 2 Ethnicity
- 3 Gender identity
- 4 Class
- 5 Language
- 6 Religion
- 7 Ability
- 8 Sexuality
- 9 Mental health
- 10 Age
- 11 Education
- 12 Body size
- (...and many more...)

Intersectionality is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it locks and intersects. It is the acknowledgement that everyone has their own unique experiences of discrimination and privilege.

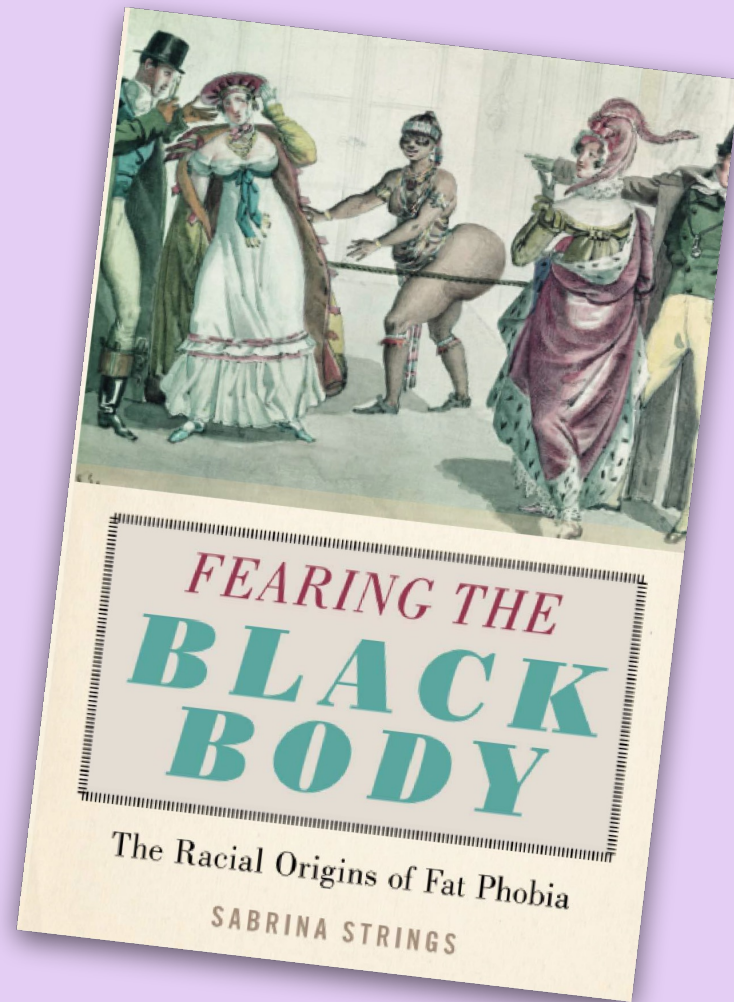
- Kimberlé Crenshaw -

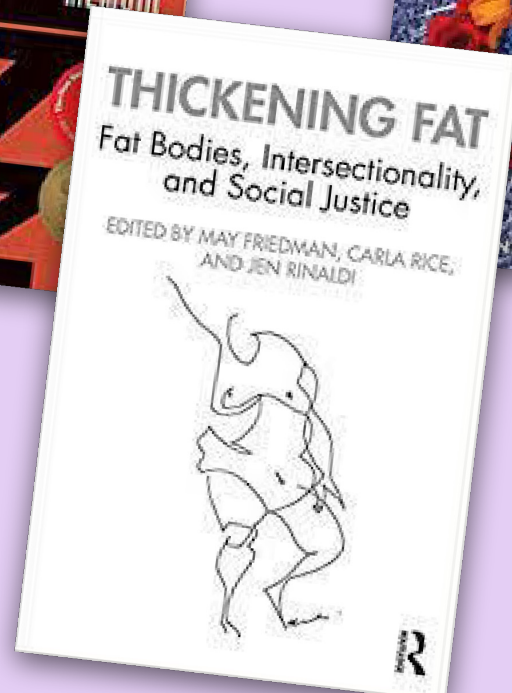
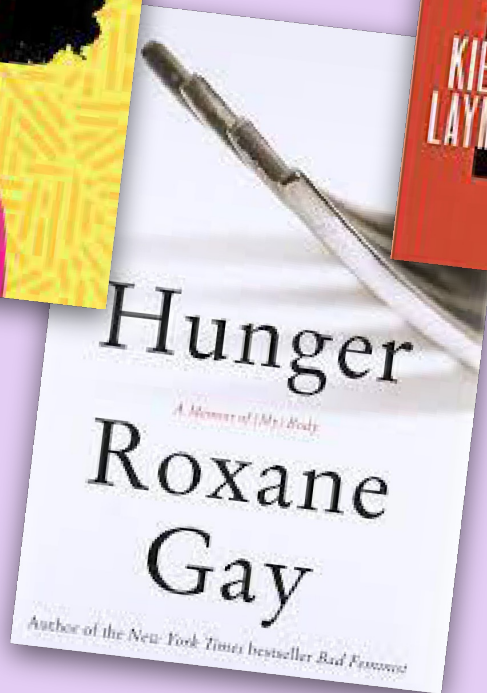
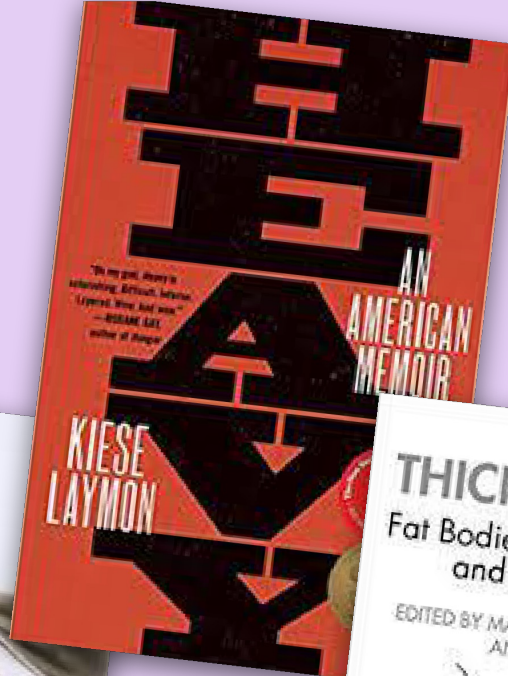
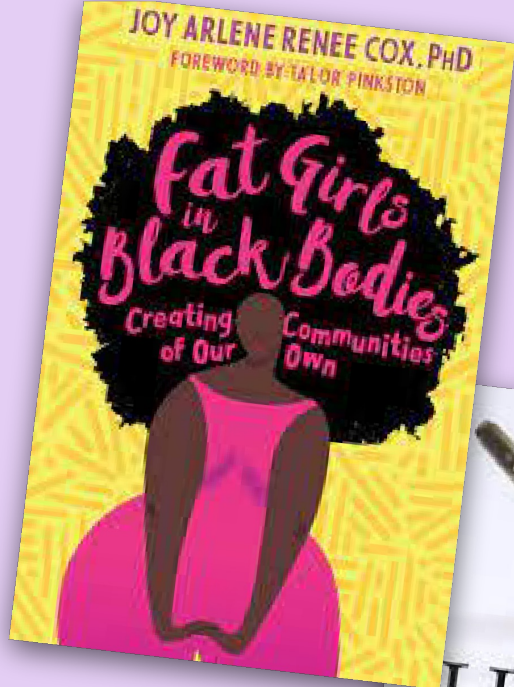


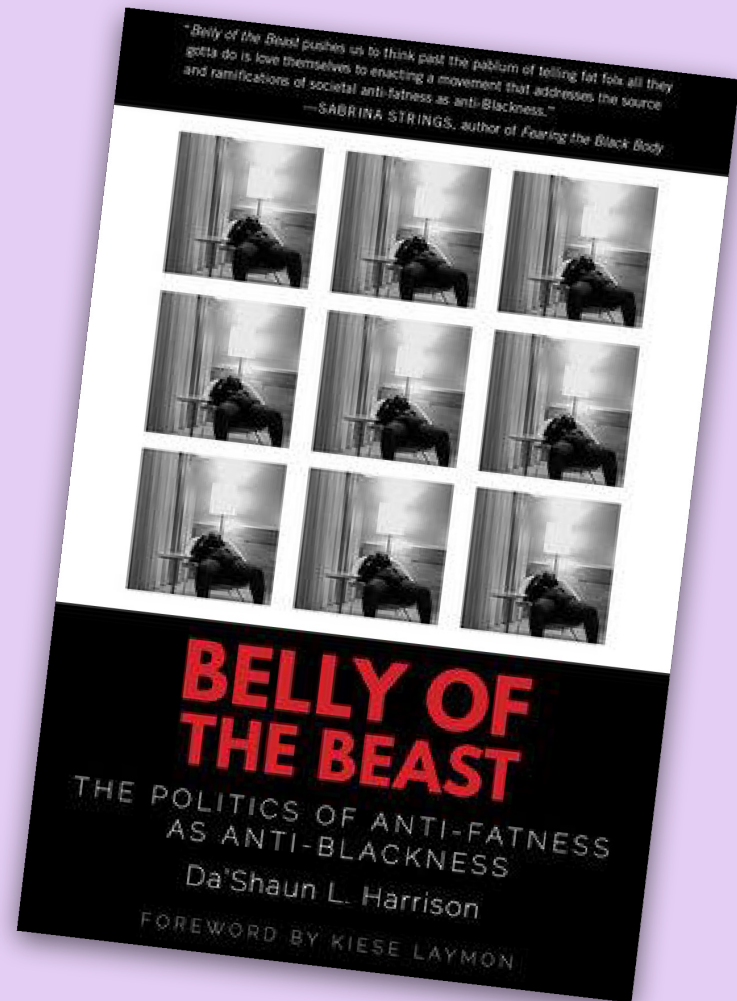
NOW

THIS

The Direct Link Between 'Fatphobia' and Racism







Assumptions on Stereotypes

Challenging stereotypes reduces racial animus
[FALSE]

- Racial cognitive dissonance
 - We think biased things but don't think we're biased
- To reduce that dissonance we...
 - Blame the oppressed group
 - Justify biased feelings



Racial Cognitive Dissonance

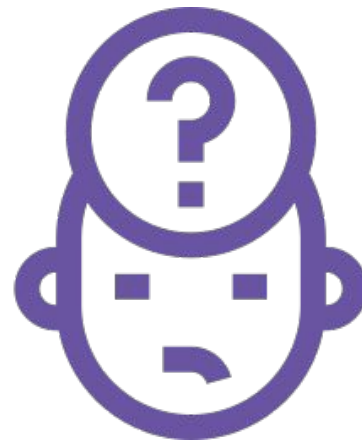
*stereotypical
response*



I'm uncomfortable.
I feel afraid.



self-perception:
I'm NOT biased.



dissonance:
Maybe I *am* biased...

Reduce Racial Cognitive Dissonance

stereotypical response



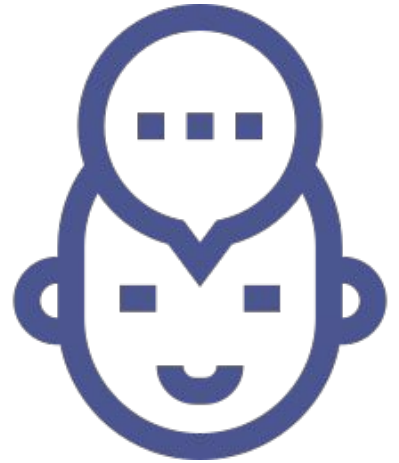
I'm uncomfortable.
I feel afraid.



tell yourself:
“person/group of
people really *are*
scary” (stereotype)



THEREFORE:
My action or
thought is
justified.



THEREFORE:
I am *not* biased.
(whew!)

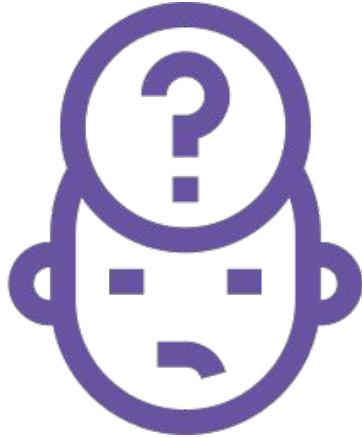
Why Stereotypes Persist

thinking
stereotypically



feeling
uncomfortable
or scared

dissonance is
unsettling



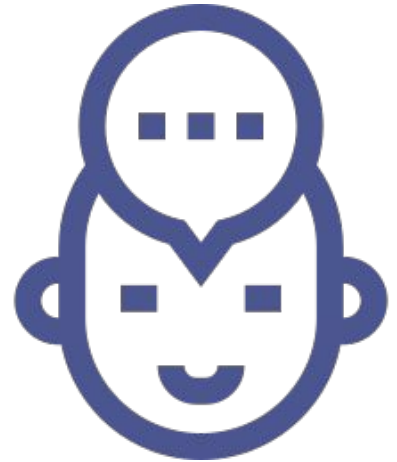
I don't *think* I'm biased...
But maybe I *am*?

dissonance resolved
by justifying stereotypes

stereotype



must be true



BECAUSE:
I'm *not* biased.
(*relief*)

Weight Stigma is Actively Encouraged & Promoted

*stereotypical
response*



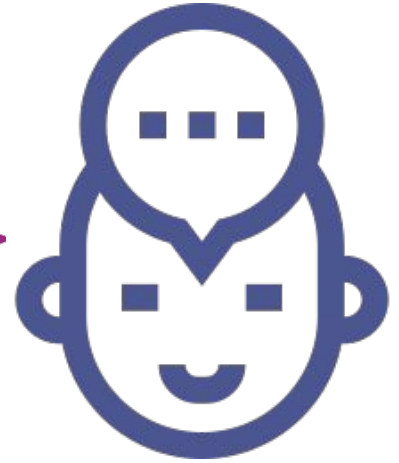
I'm uncomfortable.
I feel
disgusted,
ashamed,
judgemental.



SOCIETY TELLS US:
“fat people really *are*
gross, lazy, unhealthy,
& morally inferior”
(sanctioned stereotypes)



THEREFORE:
My actions &
thoughts are
justified.
(by media & others)



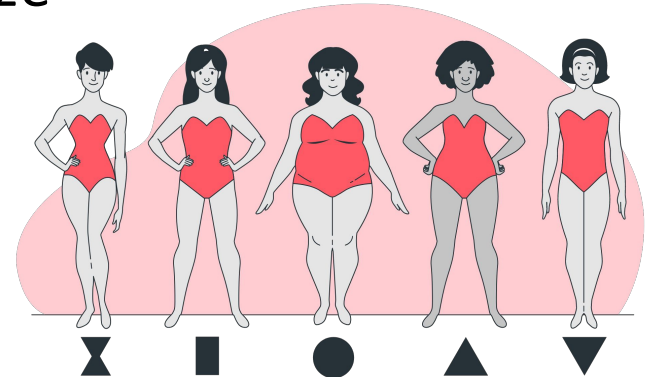
THEREFORE:
I'm doing the *right*
thing by hating &
shaming fatness.
(moral high ground)

Personhood & Humanity

1. *essentialism* | to infer an essence
 - a. characterize what is fundamental
 - b. portray based on a stereotypical trait
2. ALTERNATIVELY...

humanize others instead of dehumanize

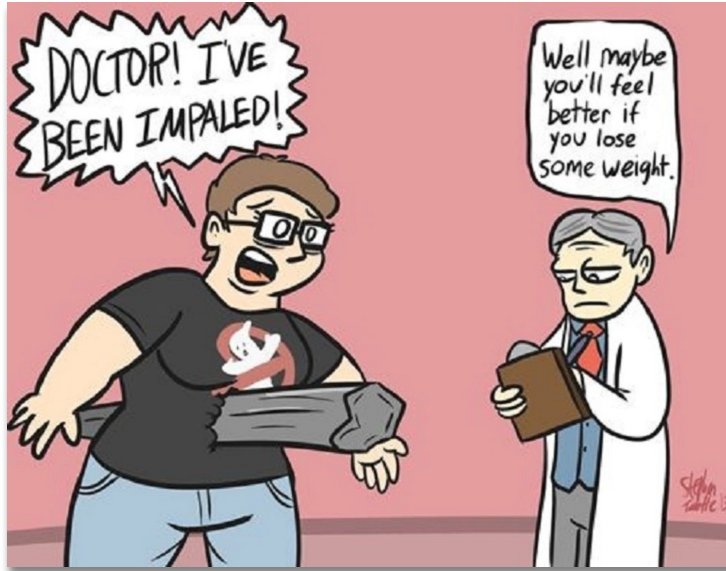
- a. changes attitudes toward a group
- b. better sense of why someone is acting or reacting the way they do





BMI & Its Discontents

Simplifying the Complex: BMI



What are your thoughts on/experiences with the Body Mass Index?



**Body size
is not a disease**



Origins of BMI

Cohort	Age	N
U. Minn. students	18–24	180
Minn. executives	49–59	249
Bantu	31–60	116
Japanese farmers	40–59	499
Japanese fishermen	40–59	535
U.S. Ry., sedentary	40–59	926
U.S. Ry., switchmen	40–59	871
E. Finland	40–59	797
W. Finland	40–59	836
Crev., Italy	40–59	978
Monte., Italy	40–59	636
Rome Railroad	40–59	802

} (presumed) white

} Black

} Japanese

} (presumed) white

Participants		
Black	116	1.6%
Japanese	1034	13.9%
white	6275	84.5%
total	7425	100%

ALL men

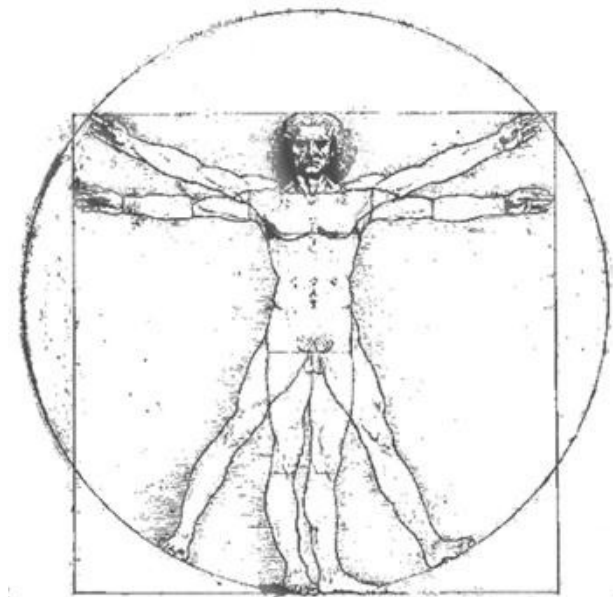
[Keys et. al, 1972]

Simplifying the Complex: BMI



What harm could be caused if the BMI is viewed at neutral and “just a data point”?

Is some (poor) data better than no data?



As with race, notions of individual agency **perpetuate misconceptions** about fatness.

Modern beliefs about “health” consider it **an independent moral responsibility** to make “good” choices about food and exercise.



“Health”

Who Decides What Counts as “Health”?

- *regimes of truth*
 - how knowledge and truth were/are produced by power structures of society
- *subjectification*
 - individuals take themselves on as projects
 - delineated by particular truth discourses
 - under certain regimes of power
 - in the name of so-called “health” for the individual or collective

FALSE ASSUMPTION





Health at Every Size[®] Principles

WEIGHT
INCLUSIVITY

HEALTH
ENHANCEMENT

RESPECTFUL
CARE

EATING FOR
WELL-BEING

LIFE-ENHANCING
MOVEMENT

Reflection



[2 min quick write]

How is this information sitting with you?

- Name the feeling. If you're feeling uncomfortable, what information made you feel that way?
- Where are you noticing that feeling/discomfort in your body?
- What thoughts are coming up?
- Can you identify the source of those thoughts? (e.g., society, caregivers, friends, media, celebrities, self)

The background is a solid purple color. In the top right corner, there is a teal-colored geometric shape that looks like a stylized staircase or a series of nested L-shapes. In the bottom left corner, there is a red circular shape partially visible, with a white triangular section inside it.

Children & Adolescents

Impact on Youth

Physically

- a. Leads to disordered eating

Emotionally

- a. Lower self-concept
- b. Anxiety & depression

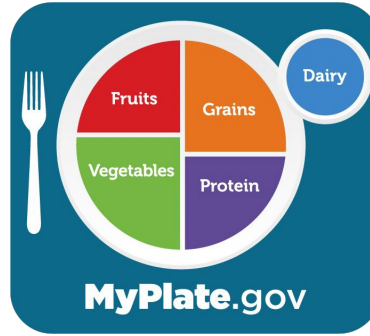
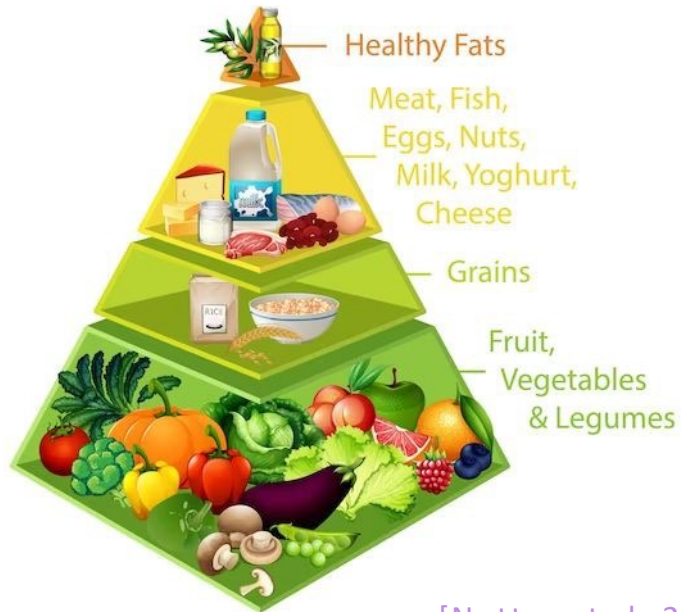
Socially

- a. Weight-based teasing
- b. Relational aggression

weight stigma
is **particularly
damaging**
during this
time of **rapid
development**
and change

School Practices

HEALTHY EATING PYRAMID



[Nutter et al., 2019; Puhl & Lessard, 2020; Ireland et al., 2021]

School Practices

Sample Body Mass Index (BMI) Screening Results Letter to Parent

Dear Parent or Guardian:

Your child, _____, recently was weighed and measured at school. Using the body mass index (BMI) screening required by Ohio's Healthy Choices for Healthy Children Act, BMI screening is a way of checking to see if your child has a healthy weight. BMI screening, given as a "percentile," compares your child's height and weight to other children of the same age and sex. Your child's BMI is being given as a percentile. You will see these results.

Your child's results were:

Height: _____ ft. _____ in. Weight: _____

☐ Underweight – less than the 5th percentile

☐ Healthy weight – 5th percentile to less than the 85th percentile

☐ Overweight – 85th percentile to less than the 95th percentile

☐ Obese – 95th percentile or greater

If your child's BMI is below the 5th percentile, he or she is underweight.

BMI Report Cards

Half of U.S. states require students to undergo BMI screening (half of these states send home the results to parents)

Increases weight stigmatization and ineffective in lowering students' weights

Particularly harmful for minoritized groups

Weight Bias in Education

Teacher bias towards fat children is well-documented in the literature

- Viewed as having lower academic, social, & cooperation skills
- Impacts academic opportunities throughout education
- Students are aware of discrimination

School psych bias towards fat children has not been investigated... yet

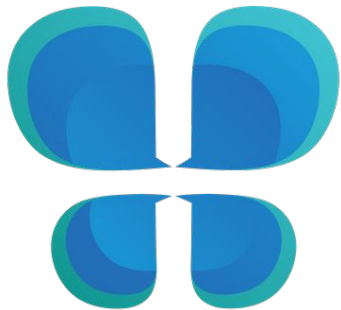
Weight-Based Bullying

- **Present throughout children's education**
 - Children as young as age three exhibit weight-based bias
 - Stereotypes worsen throughout elementary and middle school
- **Most common form of bullying**
 - 92% of high school students reported seeing weight-based bullying
- **More negative outcomes compared to other forms of bullying**
 - Especially difficult for development of middle school girls

What is going well?

- Limited school-based research
- What do we know?
 - Internalized *weight stigma* directly associated to *lower* body image, pride, and physical activity
 - Body pride leads to **joyful movement** and **higher self-esteem**

Programs in Australia



The Butterfly Foundation



Body Kind & Body Bright programs

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REFLECT

+

DISCUSS

**Where does weight
bias and fatphobia come
up in your work with kids?**

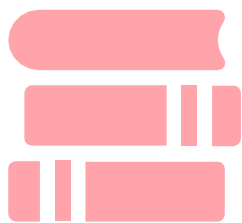
**How did it come up in your
professional training (if at all)?**

**How have you noticed these
concepts affecting people
(both kids and adults)?**

Actionable Steps

The background is a solid purple color. In the top right corner, there is a cyan-colored geometric shape that looks like a stylized staircase or a series of nested L-shapes. In the bottom left corner, there is a light purple semi-circle, and inside it, a red semi-circle, which in turn contains a white triangular shape pointing towards the center.

What can we do?



Knowledge

Educate yourselves
Learn from BIPOC creators
& activist scholars
Expand your inputs



Skills

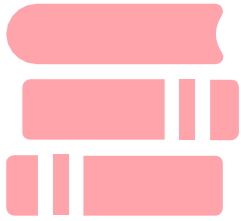
Be critical
Critique your inputs,
relationships,
& automatic thoughts
Interrupt & shift your narratives



STEP UP

How are oppressive
narratives about health
showing up?
How are moralized and
racialized issues disrupting a
path toward equity?

How can we do it?



Knowledge

Be aware of diet culture and the harm caused to mental health when folks hate their bodies



Skills

Sit with cognitive dissonance and question the beliefs and assumptions that feed into those feelings/reactions



STEP UP

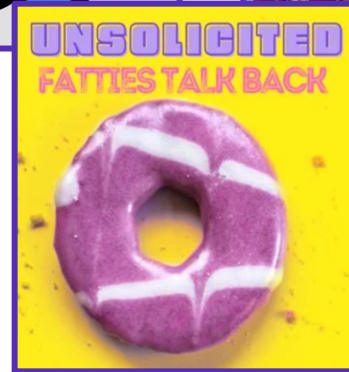
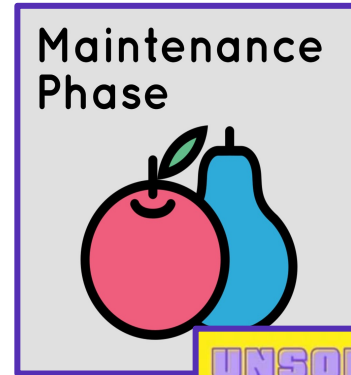
What's something you can do in your (future or present) position to positively affect health equity?

Self-education Suggestions

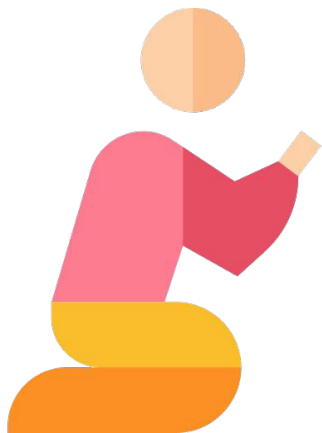
Books

- *Hunger* (R. Gay)
- *Heavy* (K. Laymon)
- *Fearing the Black Body: The Racial Origins of Fatphobia* (S. Strings)
- *Belly of the Beast: The Politics of Anti-fatness and Anti-Blackness* (D. Harrison)
- *The Body is Not an Apology* (S. R. Taylor)

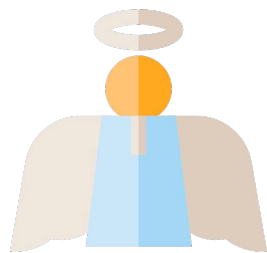
Podcasts



diet culture is a system of beliefs that:



worships
thinness



thinness =
health & virtue

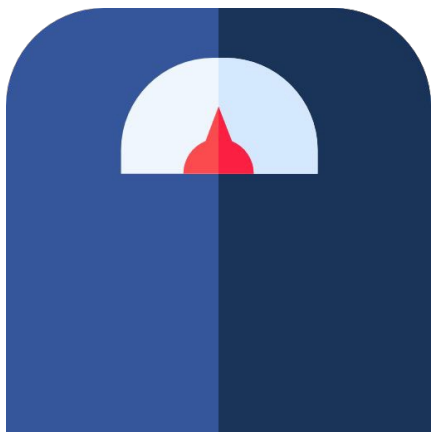


wastes your life by
making you think you are
broken

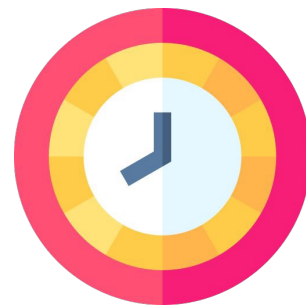
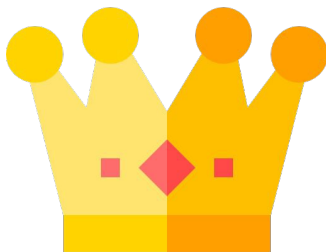


diet culture is a system of beliefs that:

promotes
weight loss



thin = high status



causes you to spend time
& money trying to shrink
your body, even though
research shows this
doesn't work

diet culture is a system of beliefs that:

DEMONIZES certain ways of eating while elevating others.



You're forced to be **hyper-vigilant** about your eating, **ashamed** of making certain food choices, and **distracted** from your pleasure, your purpose, and your power.





diet culture is a system of beliefs that:



Oppresses people who don't match
with its *supposed* picture of “health,”

which **disproportionately** harms women, femmes,
trans folks, people in larger bodies, people of
color, and people with disabilities, **damaging both**
their mental and physical health.

RESIST Diet Culture

1. Bodies, food, & fat are NOT “good” or “bad”
2. Movement is not punishment
3. All people are valuable—not based on body size
4. Weight is not equivalent to health

RESIST Diet Culture

1. **Bodies, food, & fat are NOT “good” or “bad”**
 - a. Instead, consider these as value neutral
 - b. Understand the complexity of food culture, access
2. **Movement is not punishment**
 - a. Engage in movement that brings you JOY
3. **All people are valuable—not based on body size**
 - a. Consider a person’s full humanity
 - b. Decouple worth from thinness
4. **Weight is not equivalent to health**
 - a. Value & pursue wellness in many dimensions

(RE)framing Food

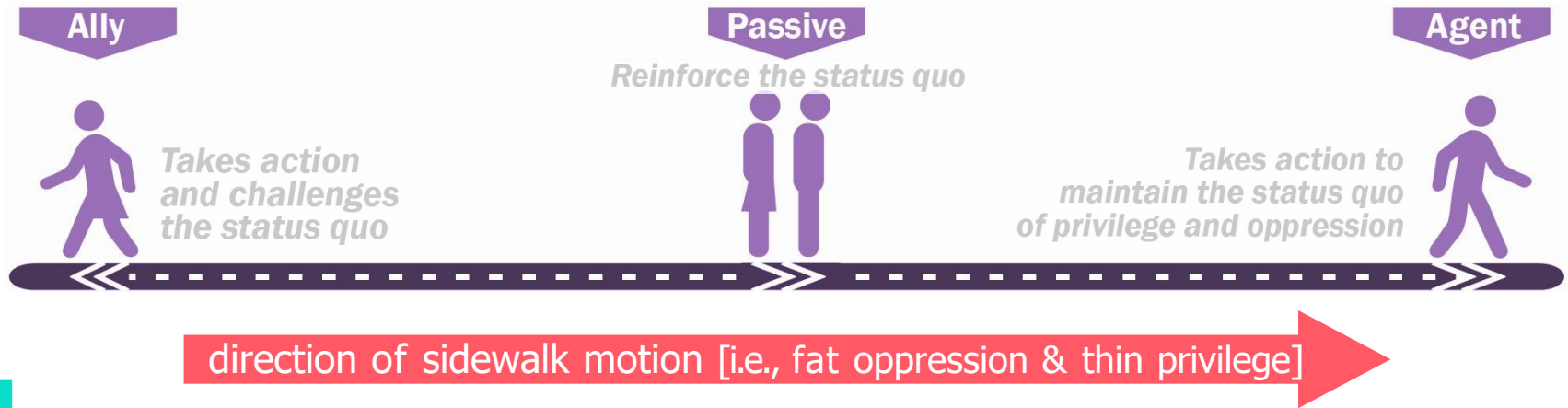
What if we thought about foods **not**
as good or bad, but as **energy**,
nutrition, and a way that we
participate in culture?

Health is not just one thing.
Diet culture tries to make us think it is.

self-assessment
aware & alert: fat bias
collaborate for equity
local policy involvement
dialogue & activism

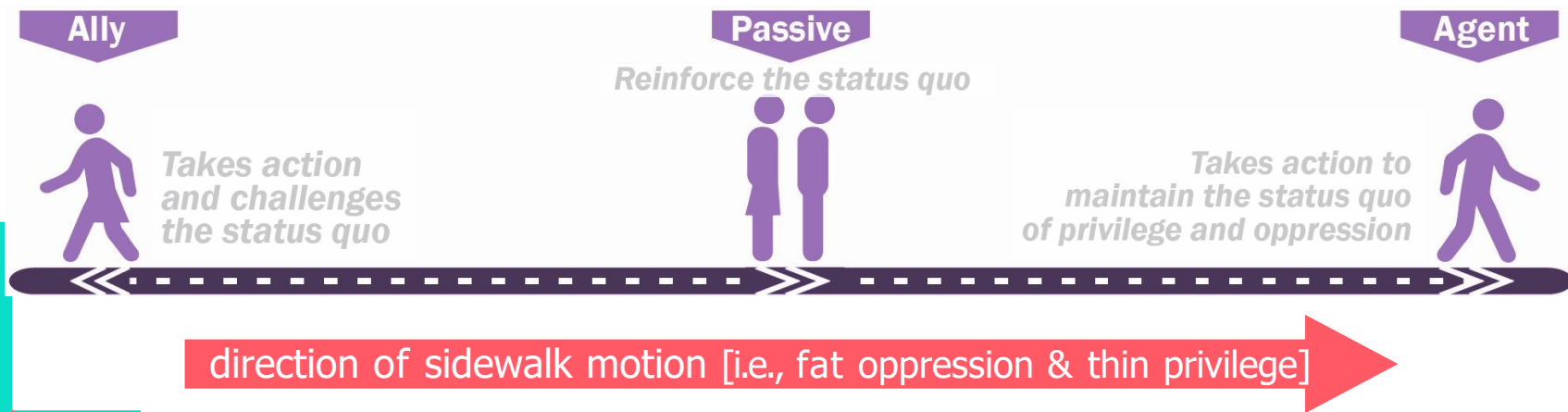
for the **DIGNITY**
& **HEALTH** of
all students,
especially those
with fat/ weight
nonconforming
bodies

Moving Sidewalk: Weight Bias



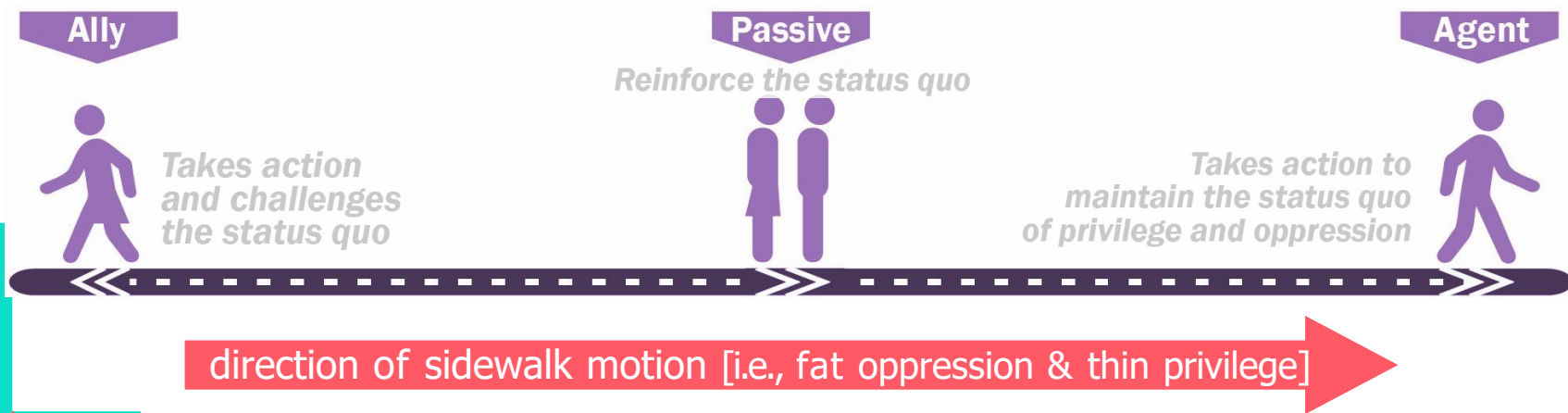
Moving Sidewalk: *Passive*

sees thinness as superior;
engages in typical behaviors
that align with diet culture
ideals; views weight gain as
moral failing



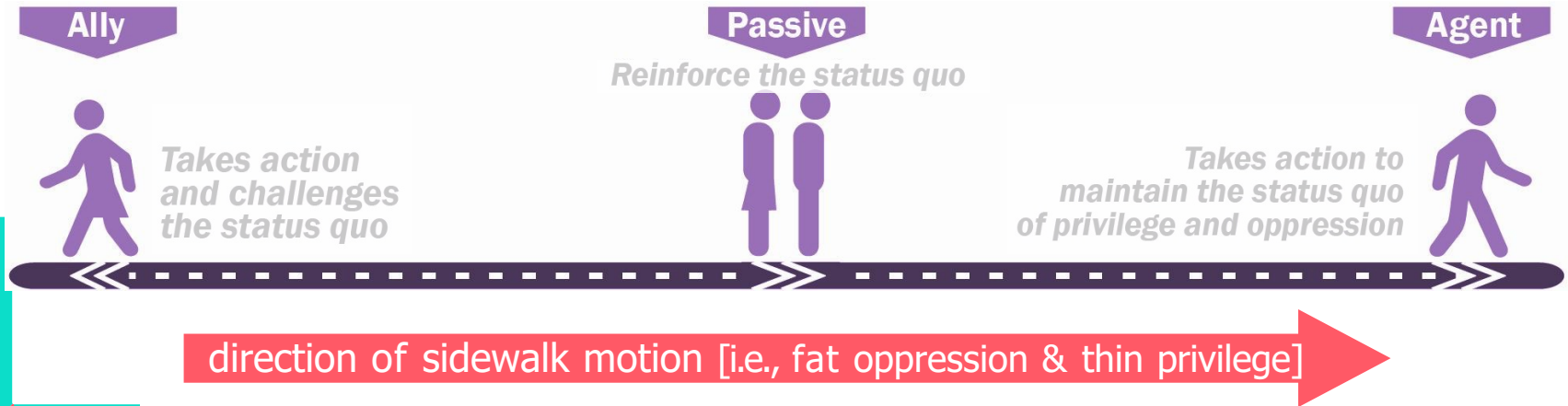
Moving Sidewalk: *Agent of Bias*

actively takes part in & encourages the oppression of larger bodies; shames self & others about weight; expresses disgust of fatness; uses BMI as a proxy for overall health; moralizes food (e.g., “good” or “bad”) with no regard to access or social justice



Moving Sidewalk: *Ally for Liberation*

actively seeks info to unlearn diet culture & thin ideals viewed as “normal”; critiques media that lacks body diversity; questions, interrupts, or intervenes when others shame or denigrate fat bodies; sees food as amoral; promotes multidimensional health



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RESEARCH ARTICLE

WILEY

Expanding notions of equity: Body diversity and social justice

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Abstract


Despite their negative effects on the emotional, physical, and social wellbeing of students, weight stigma and anti-fat attitudes are rarely systematically addressed in schools or within school psychology. Weight-based oppression is regarded differently than other domains of prejudice.



Mahalo!

@fatcritscholar

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Use QR code for a
body liberation
starter pack



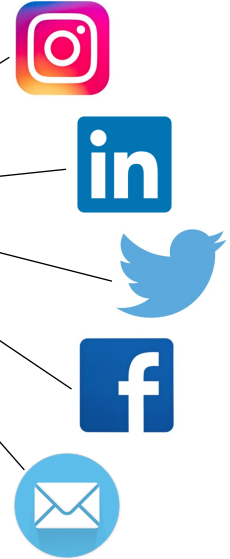
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Madison Weist, Yuna Seong, Lauren Knuckly]

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The Weight of Injustice

Exploring the Intersectionality of Fatphobia, Racism, and Mental Health

THANK YOU!

