

“...a road map through the minefield of the ‘war on obesity’...”

# Taking up SPACE

“A fat woman happy with her body is a dangerous thing in this culture.”



*How Eating Well  
& Exercising Regularly  
Changed My Life*  
**PATTIE THOMAS, Ph.D.**  
with Carl Wilkerson, M.B.A.  
foreword by Paul Campos  
author of **THE OBESITY MYTH**

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“...an intelligent, holistic treatment on the topic of fat acceptance.... Dr. Thomas’s optimism renews my faith that the work of one person does matter, and that to save one’s life (especially one’s own) is to save the whole world.”

Claudia A. Clark, Ph.D.  
Director, Association for Size Diversity & Health

“Dr. Thomas offers her perspective as a thoughtful sociologist to examine the experience of being a fat woman here and now. A consciousness-raising group is packed between the covers of this book. You will not think the same way about your own experiences after reading it.”

Deb Burgard, Ph.D.  
co-author, *Great Shape: The First Fitness Guide for Large Women*

“Dr. Thomas brings her breadth of scholarship, the wretched open heart of her own life story and the sublime artistry of her poetry into this analysis of the life of fat people. The book centers on her life and experience but holds the truth of the difficult world we fat people navigate in terms of attitudes, projections and stereotypes. It is not a dour read but rather a call for a paradigm shift that comes from her own mind, heart and body. The fat community is well served by her voice.”

Tish Parmeley  
*Fatshadow*



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“Thomas’s incisive blend of sociological inquiry and personal narrative amounts to a provocative treatise on fat oppression in our culture. *Taking Up Space* is a kind of road map through the minefield of the “war on obesity,” and it offers protection to the reader ready to fight for cultural change surrounding the meaning of fatness.”

Kathleen LeBesco, Ph.D.

Author, *Revolting Bodies:  
The Struggle to Redefine Fat Identity*

“This book has punch—from its personal fat narrative to the social context that stigmatizes a proper identity.... This is a story about acceptance, of the fat self and its body, one in need of repeated telling to others and to a public that are largely silent on acceptability.”

Jay Gubrium, Ph.D.  
Professor & Chair, Department of Sociology  
University of Missouri

“A reluctant warrior in a war she did not particularly want to fight, Pattie Thomas may, in fact, be one of its most powerful spokespersons.”

Sandy Szwarc, RN, BSN, CCP



*Pattie Thomas & Carl Wilkerson*

....Even in my thinnest moments as an adult, I was considered fat.

Most of my life I have felt like I was at war with my own body. My body seemed out of control, and I spent huge amounts of effort, time and money to tame my appetites and contain my body into a thin version of itself. I have paid a huge physical and emotional price for those battles.

About 10 years ago, I began to suspect that the battle should not be fought within my self. Since that time, I have earned a Ph.D. in sociology. As a result, I have given a lot of thought to how social and cultural practices give contexts to our experiences as people.

I came to believe that I was engaged in a cultural struggle, not a medical one. Over the past 10 years, I slowly came to the realization that my body was okay and that, far from some internal conflict, the battles I had fought were in a war that was being waged *on* me and other people like me, and, to some extent, on us all....

In 1963, sociologist Erving Goffman, in his seminal work *Stigma*, outlined the social interaction between people who are perceived as “normal” and people who are perceived as “spoiled.” The current language of the “war on obesity” that can be found in western cultures around the world is reminiscent of Goffman’s descriptions.

Fat people are not regarded simply as a group of people with a medical condition. Their *identity* is inextricably tied to being fat. Being fat in a world that considers fatness abnormal means being perceived as spoiled. Thus, the “war on obesity” is actually a war not on a disease, but on the people who are considered to have that disease. The war on obesity is a war on fat people.

For fat people, especially those of us who have a positive and accepting view of ourselves and other fat people, such a war is disturbing. We find ourselves reluctant warriors in a war that we did not start and we do not want to fight.

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“*Taking Up Space* could be called a memoir with a Ph.D., or it could be called sociology with a heart.

“Pattie Thomas brings to the table her careful study and analysis of the medical, political, and social aspects of weight in our culture. To this she adds her witty and deeply felt poetry, as well as her revealing and personal journal (and journey) on the path to self-love. That path, she shows, requires that fat people recognize the bigotry that is aimed at them.

....Fat people are the first line of defense in a political economy designed to make all people feel dissatisfied with their bodies and then exploit that dissatisfaction for profit. Fat people are the first line of defense in a culture built upon a glorification of impossibly narrow standards of beauty and health.

Acceptance of fat people will open up possibilities of recognition and acceptance of the beauty and the healthiness of *all* bodies. As we open up spaces for ourselves, fat people can open up spaces and make room for everyone.

### *The Doctor's Office*

Condescension  
drips from his lips.

“You need to take in less calories  
than you expend,” he says  
in slow, elementary tones.

No questions about what I want.

I guess I am just not the one to ask.

All I can think to say is  
“Fewer.”  
You mean to say,  
“You need to take in *fewer* calories . . .”

I, of course,  
say nothing.

*Pattie Thomas*  
1994

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“...this book provides insights and resources for professionals as well as for those who struggle with issues of weight and body image. *Taking Up Space* should be required reading for all those who want to help make this world a better place.”

Miriam Berg  
President  
Council on Size & Weight Discrimination