

“...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.

“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

“...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



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For Immediate Release

Taking Up Space:
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Can We Win the War on Obesity?

A medical sociologist who dieted herself into disability calls for victory in the “war on obesity” by teaching people how to be healthy and fat.

PHOENIX, AZ—In 1996, C. Everett Koop, former Surgeon General of the United States, issued a declaration of “War on Obesity,” calling on physicians to do more to treat America’s growing waistline.

Since Koop’s declaration, a number of medications have been fast tracked onto the market, leading to recalls, deaths, disabilities and lawsuits. The number of weight loss surgeries has grown astronomically, many ending with death and disabilities and many not resulting in much weight loss. There has been an explosion of over-the-counter potions that have little or no positive effect on weight and often a negative effect on health. The business of losing weight has exploded into a multi-billion-dollar industry.

And since Koop’s declaration of a “war on obesity,” Americans have grown fatter.

Pattie Thomas, Ph.D. is a medical sociologist who has been fat most of her life. In the past eight years, she has also had to deal with being disabled. “I believe I essentially dieted myself into disability,” she says, noting that she was until five years ago the quintessential weight-cycler—one who repeatedly loses weight only to regain it.

In her sociological memoir *Taking Up Space: How Eating Well & Exercising Regularly Changed My Life* (Pearlson Press, 2005), Thomas, with the help of her co-author and husband, Carl Wilkerson, uses her own experiences as a fat woman as a case study of the havoc the war on obesity has raised on her life and well-being.

“The problem with the war mentality is that someone becomes the enemy,” Thomas explains. “Since fat is a part of a human body, **waging a war on fat inevitably leads to waging a war on the fat.**”

Drawing upon sociological, cultural and political understandings of fatness, health, beauty and stigma, Thomas provides what author Kathleen LeBesco (*Revolting Bodies? The Struggle to Redefine Fat Identity*) calls “a road map through the minefield of the ‘war on obesity.’”

Can we win the war on obesity? Thomas suggests that indeed we can. But not by becoming a svelte “after” picture, as depicted in so many weight-loss ads. Instead, she advocates giving up the battle of the bulge altogether, and instead **learning how to be a healthy fat person.**

“Ending the ‘war on obesity’ is conceptually simple,” Thomas writes. “Just stop fighting it. Make ‘obesity’ an antiquated ‘disease’ that gets left in the history books like ‘dropsy’ and ‘neurasthenia.’ Ending the war on obesity is not easy, however. It requires nothing less than rethinking our culture’s view of bodies, health, and beauty.



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Expanded Biography for Pattie Thomas, Ph.D.



Pattie Thomas describes herself as a reluctant warrior in “the war on obesity.” She envisions herself not as a svelte former fattie like the countless commercials offered in the media, but as a *Sumo* ready to knock down those who wage war on fat and fat people.

The *Sumo warrior*, she suggests, is a perfect symbol for fat people in the so-called “war on obesity” because Sumos are front-line warriors who traditionally used their girth to open up space for others to win their battles. If the world can accept fat people as they are, then *all* people would be acceptable, and diversity would be celebrated.

Her sociological memoir, *Taking Up Space*, is about being fat and the physical, emotional and economic costs of trying to pass for thin in a culture and society that wages war on fat people.

Making her own life a case study, using her doctorate in medical sociology, Thomas, with her co-author and husband Carl Wilkerson, outlines how stigma limit and shape the life chances of *all* people. Together Thomas and Wilkerson demonstrate how the “war on obesity” can be won, not by losing weight, but by simply giving up the battle with the bulge and instead learning how to carry one’s weight well.

Thomas is a reluctant warrior, however. She wrote her memoir because “being fat” is a central fact in her life—or so it is from the point of view of others. Thomas would rather be remembered as a writer, poet, artist, photographer, filmmaker, sociologist, traveler and entrepreneur. By confronting those who would sum up her life by her size, she has found the time and creativity to develop all those passions. She hopes that she has demonstrated how a sociologically examined life can lead to personal growth.



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Expanded Biography for Carl Wilkerson



Carl Wilkerson is a deeply passionate human being who has many skills, talents and educational experiences, some of which may seem contradictory in nature and none of which can be said to describe the sum total of his life.

He is a writer, composer, lyricist, filmmaker, humorist, radio producer and performing artist. He has a Bachelor of Science from Wake Forest University in mathematics and an MBA from the Goizueta School of Business at Emory University.

Wilkerson is an entrepreneur. He is a public philosopher. He loves to travel. He has a working knowledge of French and is learning Spanish.

Oh yeah, and Wilkerson is deeply and passionately in love with a fat woman. This last fact about his life is many times the only one to which people pay attention. In the current cultural climate, being associated with fat people is as “bad” as being fat.

That is why, when given the opportunity for yet another collaboration with his wife and creative partner, Pattie Thomas, Wilkerson accepted the challenge with relish. Thomas’s sociological memoir, *Taking Up Space*, is about being fat and the physical, emotional and economic costs of trying to pass for thin in a culture and society that wages war on fat people.

By making her life as a fat woman a case study, Thomas and Wilkerson outline how stigma limit and shape the life chances of **all** people. Together they demonstrate how the “war on obesity” can be won, not by losing weight, but by simply giving up the battle with the bulge and instead learning how to carry one’s weight well.

For Thomas, this is especially hard because she faces debilitating illnesses that may be directly related to her efforts to lose weight over a 30-year period. Wilkerson plays the role of her caregiver with compassion. His collaboration in this project directly reflects his desire for the war on fat people to end so that both he and his partner can develop and pursue their passions with as few social and physical barriers as possible.



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Twelve Tips for Fighting Fat Stigma

Co-authored by Pattie Thomas, Ph.D.

**with size diversity expert Veronica Cook-Euell, M.A., P.H.R.,
Euell Consulting Group LLC & host of *Size Matters with Veronica***

1. Abandon the idea of “*The Perfect Weight*”

Each and every one of us is unique. Find the beauty that diversity has to offer. Belief that there is a perfect weight only limits you and others. Look deeper into the eyes of every person you encounter and look for something positive. You’ll soon realize the strength, beauty and quality each person possesses uniquely. It’s so easy to judge when the other person’s weakness is your strength.

2. Consider size as “the other diversity®.”

Expand your diversity consciousness to include body size and weight. Be conscious of *sizeism*. Explore opportunities for acceptance and inclusion. Remember, tolerance is **not** the goal. **No one wants to be “tolerated;” we all desire to be accepted and included.**

3. Develop an inclusive aesthetic.

Encourage depictions of people of size that have dignity and beauty. Keep artwork that reflects diversity in your office or home. Refuse to support entertainment that reinforces myths about people of size, and challenge providers of entertainment to be more inclusive in their offerings.

4. Do not repeat baseless or inaccurate ideas or assumptions to others.

If you didn’t do the research, it isn’t part of your personal experience, or you just don’t know how you know what you know, then don’t repeat it. Misinformation can seem legitimate just because it has been repeated so much. For example, do not mistake “thinness” for health or “fatness” for lack of health. Healthy behaviors for “all” should be the goal; i.e., walking is good for everybody, and so is eating fresh fruits and vegetables, whether dieting or not.

5. Examine humor for worn-out stereotypes.

Humor is a two-edged sword. It helps us cope, not take ourselves so seriously, and often points out the absurdity of human arrogance. But it can also reinforce and rely upon worn-out stereotypes. Two basic questions: Does it hurt others? If yes, do those others deserve to be made uncomfortable? An old adage to remember is that social change happens when we “afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted.” Humor can be used for both those ends.

6. Respect the privacy of others by keeping questions of health, diet and exercise personal.

Health, well-being, exercise and eating are personal choices and should be regarded as private. Discussions of such things are natural among friends and might be comfortable for some, but deciding for someone else what they *should* or *should not* be doing is invading their privacy.

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Twelve Tips for Fighting Fat Stigma
Pattie Thomas with Veronica Cook-Euell
Size – The Other Diversity ©

7. Design spaces to promote and respect body diversity.

Become aware of the principles of universal access/design. Consider that the way different people move in space—sit, walk, etc.—will be different and will require different designs. Include people of diverse sizes, abilities, ages and cultural backgrounds in the planning of construction and decoration, whether it be in your home, your business or your community.

8. Challenge venues that do not provide universal access.

Do not take for granted your own comfort in a particular space. Even if you don't need special accommodations, your challenge to the managers of venues that do not provide access counts. Be aware of your surroundings. If a business doesn't provide accessibility, tell them that you want them to be accessible to your larger colleagues and friends and they can earn your business by providing that. If you are a business owner, reflect upon how inclusive your business is and make changes towards providing access to everyone.

9. Include larger people in organizational and social circles.

This can be done by invitation, but it also needs to include forethought about the ways in which participation can be discouraged. For example, ordering team shirts or corporate shirts only in S-M-L-XL means that you don't want to include larger people. Having only small chairs with arms in meeting rooms implies exclusion as well. If you are at an event and there aren't any people of size present, you should ask yourself "why?" If 60-75% of all Americans are people of size, why aren't they included?

10. When planning business ventures, consider the plus-sized market as a viable part of marketing strategy.

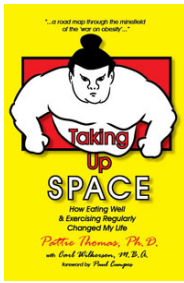
There is no more effective way to eliminate a stigma in our capitalist society than to transform a stigmatized group into a consumer group. Products designed for larger people and advertisements geared toward larger people will create familiarity and acceptability of those larger people. This strategy will positively affect your bottom line! People of size make up the majority in this country.

11. Do not tolerate gossip, put-downs, prejudicial speech in other people.

Point out the prejudice and stigma such speech creates. Use snappy comebacks or humor to get the point across. Walk away and tell the speakers why you are walking away. Tell the speaker that you do not wish to hear what they are saying and ask them to change the subject. Just remember that apathy and silence imply consent. You've made a decision. Recall the popular commercial "**the power of one voice.**" One person's voice can raise the consciousness of many. If you speak out against fat stigma when you see it, you will make a difference for that moment in that place. Every single time a voice is raised for the inclusion of people of size, we all get a little closer to changing the stigma and creating a new attitude about fatness and fat people. You do make a difference.

12. Giving up a personal prejudice against fat is not enough.

Fat stigma should be challenged at organizational and institutional levels as well as personal levels. It is not the job of people of size to change fat stigma. If it were up to the stigmatized to change stigma, those practicing size discrimination would be given a blank check. It is up to all of us to practice inclusion. Embrace size diversity. Be aware of the many ways in which people of size are excluded from basic human activities such as work, recreation and social engagements. Challenge stigma and you can change stigma.



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Questions and Answers on Size Diversity Miriam Berg, President Council on Size & Weight Discrimination

What is weight discrimination?

Discrimination is defined as unfair difference in treatment made between people because of specific characteristics. It is based on prejudice, which is defined as preconceived opinion or judgment without just grounds or before sufficient knowledge. In its extreme, discrimination is called bigotry, which is defined as obstinate and unreasoning attachment to one's own opinions, with intolerance to any opposing views. When the specific characteristic is body size and weight, that is weight discrimination, weight prejudice, or weight bigotry.

Is weight discrimination much of a problem?

Yes. In our culture, people who are larger than average encounter discriminatory attitudes and are denied equal opportunity in many areas of their lives:

Prospective employers often refuse to hire large size people, especially in jobs where employees do physical work, or jobs where employees interact with the public.

Large people are subject to harassment about their weight by their employers, are kept in jobs beneath their abilities, and are often demoted or fired because of stated or unstated weight prejudice.

Physicians and other health care professionals often tell fat patients to lose weight rather than treating them for their specific medical conditions.

Health care facilities and equipment (such as CAT scans and MRIs) are often inaccessible to large people.

Large people are systematically denied health insurance and life insurance, or they are forced to pay higher premiums than those of average weight.

Applicants are often turned down by colleges, universities, and other educational institutions because of their weight.

Landlords, housing agencies, and real estate agents often deny larger people apartments, or show them only inferior locations, to prevent them from moving into the neighborhood.

There are many other aspects of weight discrimination. The Council has consulted with a person who was denied membership in a traveling choir because of her weight, large-size couples who were turned down as adoptive parents, and a man who was asked to accept a refund on his gym membership because customers had complained that they didn't like to look at his body.

Public facilities are inaccessible to many large people because of turnstiles, narrow armchairs, narrow doors, hallways, stairs, and small bathrooms.

Airplanes, trains, and buses often have seating that is uncomfortably small or tight for larger-than-average people.

Isn't it true that fat people are lazy, stupid, weak-willed, lacking in ambition, selfish, greedy, gluttonous, sedentary, and ugly?

No, none of these characterizations have any basis in fact. These are false stereotypes that are used to justify the prejudice and discrimination that fat people suffer. The same stereotypes have been used against Native Americans, Mexicans, African Americans, poor people, and other groups that have been subject to systematic discrimination by the dominant culture of the United States and other countries. People of all sizes, classes, and ethnic groups have positive and negative qualities. Some may have personality traits of which we don't approve, but it is unfair to make a judgment about an entire group based on a stereotype or based on one individual's behavior.

Doesn't an employer have the right to refuse to hire fat people?

An employer can insist that a job applicant be qualified to do the job, likeable, and personable, but any criterion which excludes an entire group of people—African Americans, people with disabilities, or larger-than-average people—is unacceptable.

Doesn't an employer have the right to fire or demote employees if they gain a lot of weight?

The only valid criterion for job evaluation, raises, promotions, disciplinary action, demotion, or firing is job performance. If an employer thinks an employee's weight hinders their ability to do the job, the employer should discuss this with the employee and make a determination, not make a judgment about the person's ability based solely on their weight.

What if the job is a fire fighter or some other position that requires physical fitness?

Employers have the right to require a test of physical fitness for any job that requires strength, agility, or stamina. If the position requires a person to be able to carry a hose up a ladder, then the job interview can and should include a simulation of that situation. If the applicant can perform the task to the employer's satisfaction, it should not matter what that applicant weighs. Conversely, just because a job applicant is thin does not mean that he or she is physically fit or capable of handling a strenuous job.

What if the job is a waitress or a receptionist or salesperson or someone else who has to deal with the public all the time?

Employers can insist that their public representatives be well groomed, appropriately dressed, and personable. It is wrong to assume that fat people are not capable of serving the public well. Consider comedian and talk show host Rosie O'Donnell. She is charming, engaging, immensely popular, and makes all her guests feel welcome. She has stated on network television that she weighs over 200 pounds. But she would obviously be an excellent candidate for any position that required interaction with clients or members of the public.

Isn't it true that fat people take up too much space on buses, trains, and airplanes?

This question has made headlines because of the notoriously cramped seating on airplanes, and a lawsuit in which a fat person sued an airline for requiring her to buy two seats. But airlines and other carriers do not state that they are selling a certain amount of space. They advertise fares for passage for one adult from one point to another. Truth in advertising requires that they provide that passage. If they want to change their policy and state that they are selling a certain number of inches of space, then they will have to give discounted rates to those who are smaller than average.

Aren't Americans getting fatter and fatter?

Yes, the statistics show that the average weight of people in this country is going up.

Isn't this because of people being gluttons and not doing any exercise?

No. The reasons for our increasing average weight have much more to do with changes in the economy. We were once an agrarian society, and most people did physically demanding work all the time. When we became an industrial society, work was still physically demanding. Today, most people's work requires little or no physical activity. Cars and public transportation are so available that walking and bicycling are no longer common modes of transportation. In addition, our style of preparing and eating food has changed completely. We used to prepare food from scratch in the home, and eat most meals at home. Today, most people eat a

substantial portion of their food outside of the home. Food is no longer scarce, and is in fact universally available and widely advertised. Huge industries compete with each other to make their food more enticing, more available, and cheaper than that of their competitors. Advertisers are not under any pressure to sell healthy food, so they advertise what will tempt people to eat as much as possible.

Isn't it unhealthy to be fat?

Sometimes. While some fat people are unhealthy, there are some people who can be both fat and healthy. Fatness by itself is not a disease, but rather a risk factor for certain chronic diseases, such as diabetes. That means that in a group of fat people, you will find more diabetics than in a group of thin people. There is a correlation between fatness and diabetes. Scientist have not, however, proven that fatness causes diabetes. Correlation is not the same as causation. Some researchers have proposed that there is another unknown factor that causes both the diabetes and the fatness.

Poor nutrition and lack of physical activity have, however, been proven to be unhealthy. This is true no matter whether a person is thin or fat.

Even if it were proven that being fat was always unhealthy, the problem is that we do not have a cure for fatness. (Also see the answer to the following question.)

Shouldn't we do something about the increasing weight of Americans?

Yes and no. Good public health policy demands that we address the problems of poor nutrition and lack of physical activity. Pre-schools, elementary schools, high schools, and colleges should be providing nutrition education, healthy food choices, and opportunities for physical activity for students. Businesses should provide similar opportunities for their workers. Government programs should subsidize such opportunities for poor people. And there should be public advertising campaigns that teach people the benefits of eating nutritious food and getting enough physical activity.

However, it is wrong—and counter-productive—to make such an educational campaign into a weight-loss program. First of all, knowing a person's weight is not the same as knowing whether they eat healthy food or whether they get enough exercise. Thin people need this education just as much as fat people. And secondly, all currently known weight-loss techniques have been abysmal failures. More than 90% of dieters regain the weight they lost. No other medical recommendation has such a high failure rate. Until science has come up with a way for people to lose weight and keep it off permanently, it is useless to recommend weight loss. It may even be damaging to the public health, since there is some evidence that repeated diets can lead to binge eating and choosing much less healthy foods. Many dieters end up regaining more weight than they lost. Some feel that the diet craze in the last few decades is at least partly responsible for the increasing rate of obesity in America.

Isn't it true that fat people use up more than their share of the public health care dollar?

No. As a society, we have chosen to join together and share in the funding of public health care. Many of us also pay for private health care and/or health insurance. We do not get to pick who deserves what portion of the resources available. Athletes use more health care services because they are at higher risk for broken bones, injuries to soft tissues, etc. Those who drive cars put themselves at greater risk for traffic accidents. Older people use a majority of the public health care dollar. And to use a truly parallel example, poverty is a risk factor for most major diseases. Poor people use more public money on health care, and have worse outcomes.

The difference is that our society does not disapprove of athletes or car drivers, and we recognize that it is unfair to blame poor people or old people for their greater use of health care resources. But when it comes to obesity, weight prejudice makes our society intolerant. We blame fat people for their condition no matter what the real cause. We blame fat people for not losing weight, no matter how difficult or impossible that might be. We blame fat people for using more than "their share" of health care resources. Our society does this because of prejudice, bigotry, and intolerance against those who are heavier than average.

What is the origin of weight discrimination?

There are several theories for the origin of our culture's disapproval of fatness. Since it seems to have started in the early part of the twentieth century, some say it started with motion pictures, since they say "the camera puts on 15 pounds". One theory says that the beginning of ready-to-wear clothing changed everything. Until the early 1900s, all clothing was custom-made, so a person's size was of no significance. Once clothing was manufactured in a range of sizes, anything outside that range started to be considered different, or not "normal".

Since weight discrimination affects women disproportionately, some feel that the disapproval of larger body size has its roots in the rise in women's power. After women won the right to vote and started participating as full active members of society, many men felt threatened by women's power and stature, and there was a backlash against feminism. Even today, successful women are constrained by the cultural pressure that forces them to spend enormous amounts of time and money on their appearance. A large portion of that time and energy is spent on the obsession with thinness and the fear of fatness.

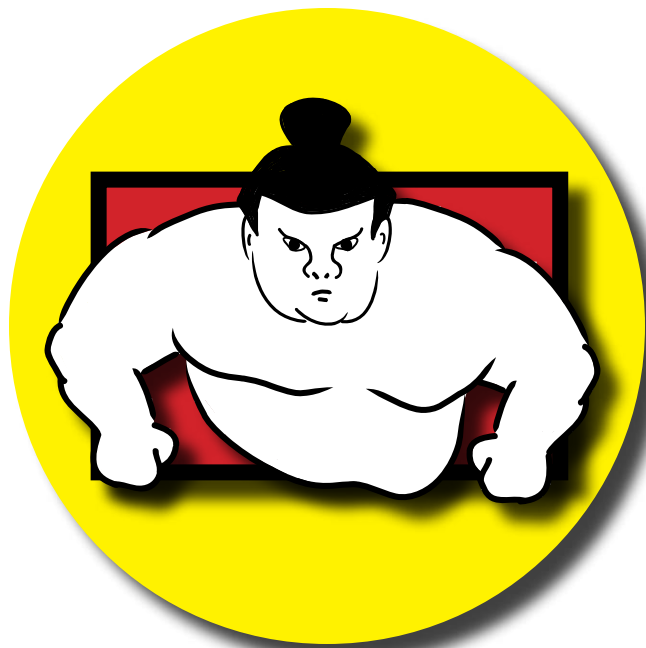
Still another theory holds that fear of fatness is akin to fear of pleasure and bodily indulgence. Since the United States was partly founded by strictly religious, fundamentalist Puritans, this theory says that our culture has an underlying fear and distrust of pleasure, including the pleasures of eating as well as sex. This explains why some people consider themselves righteous when they abstain from food, sex, or leisure, or when they exercise obsessively. According to this theory, those with more fat on their bodies are perceived to be self-indulgent, which is said to justify any disrespectful treatment they might receive.

Are things getting better or worse for fat people today?

It is difficult to say. Some ways that things are getting worse include: An increasing number of weight-loss advertisements, including fraudulent weight-loss scams; the rise in the number of people (mostly women) with eating disorders, indicating that fear of fatness is increasing; and increased bullying, harassment, and violence against fat children and teenagers.

On the other hand, there are some indicators that the situation is improving for larger people. There is a lot more career clothing available for larger men and women, indicating that job opportunities may be opening up. There are new social opportunities for larger people opening up all the time, as indicated by the many websites, social clubs, conventions, and gatherings specifically for larger people. Larger actors are seen in substantial roles in movies and on television, and some of them are portrayed as romantic interests. And more and more books and articles talk about the possibility that large people can have good self-esteem and full, active, and happy lives.

Declaration of Taking Up SPACE



In 1996 the United States government, in a statement issued by C. Everett Koop, declared a “War on Obesity.”

- This so-called war stigmatizes fat people and threatens our well-being, our health and our life chances.
- This so-called war has casualties in the form of extreme dieting, experimental drugs, stomach mutilations, school and workplace bullying and the denial of basic human rights on the basis of how a person looks.
- This so-called war threatens the right of everyone to care for and protect their bodies as they see fit.

We are reluctant warriors in the war on fat people.

Like a Sumo, whose traditional role as a warrior was on the front lines, fat people are the first line of defense against a government and a culture determined to control our bodies.

We believe that:

- Fat is just an adjective and should not be used as a moral indictment or a diagnosis.
- Fat people have always and will always exist as a natural variation of human bodies.
- People of all sizes deserve a chance to prove themselves on the basis of their character and their actions, not on how they look.
- It is time to end the war on fat by celebrating the beauty and diversity of all human beings.
- It is time to build strong bodies of all sizes, shapes and colors by encouraging the **Health At Every Size** model rather than weight loss.

Fat warriors come in all shapes and sizes. **Anyone who understands that freedom to control one's body is a basic part of freedom is invited to join us in ending the war on fat people.**

As reluctant warriors, we will not back down until the war has ended and fatness is no longer considered a disease.

**We will continue defending our bodies.
We will continue strengthening our resolve.
We will continue taking up space.**

Pattie Thomas, Ph.D.
author, **TAKING UP SPACE**

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TAKING UP SPACE

How Eating Well & Exercising Regularly Changed My Life

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