

Obesity - The Human Costs of America's Fight Against Fat



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Public Health Campaign to Society-wide “War on Fat”

- ❑ All social institutions and individuals recruited to join the fight
- ❑ Fat-talk (all communications about weight) is ubiquitous
- ❑ America, a fat-talk nation
- ❑ Anthropological research
 - 250 3- to 12-pg. mostly auto-biographical narratives of California youth
 - Ethnographic accounts allow us to connect the dots between the societal fight against fat and its effects in individual lives



How the War on Fat Works

- ❑ Fatness is about morality and inclusion/exclusion or citizenship
- ❑ Fat people deemed “bad,” undeserving of inclusion in community of good Americans
- ❑ Thin, fit people are “good biocitizens” with two duties
 - Diet, exercise, and maintain normal weight themselves
 - Use pedagogical and abusive fat-talk to get others to do the same



Human costs

- ❑ Identities based on BMI score, “spoiled identities”
- ❑ Bodily harm from excessive dieting and exercising
- ❑ Psychiatric risk
- ❑ Frayed social relationships
- ❑ And fat-talk did not even work to reduce obesity




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My BMI Calculator Metric

My Height feet inches


My Weight lbs

Calculate BMI

 National Heart
Lung and Blood Institute

BMI SCALE

Underweight	< 18.5
Normal	18.5 - 24.9
Overweight	25 - 29.9
Obese	≥ 30



Take-away points

- ❑ Fat-talk/biocitizen approach has the potential to harm everyone, not just heavy people
- ❑ Stigma and shaming are culturally legitimate, will be hard to stop
- ❑ Psychological damage to children and teens is often long-term
- ❑ Human costs should be weighed along with the economic costs
- ❑ Need a cultural revolution to rethink fat-talk and stop fat abuse

