

It's Time to Rethink Our Attitude to Fatness, Academic Argues

Prejudice against fat people is endemic in society and public health initiatives aimed at reducing obesity have worsened the problem, a U.S. academic warns.

NEW YORK, NEW YORK, UNITED STATES, July 8, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Prejudice against fat people is endemic in our society and public health initiatives aimed at reducing obesity have only worsened the problem, according to a U.S. academic.

In her new book [Why It's OK To Be Fat](#), Rekha Nath, an Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Alabama, argues for a paradigm shift in how society approaches fatness.

According to Nath, society must stop approaching fatness as a trait to rid the population of, and instead fatness should be approached through the lens of social equality, attending to the systematic ways that society penalizes fat people for their body size.

Nath explains: "Being fat is seen as unattractive, as gross even. We view fat as a sign of weakness, of greediness, of laziness. And we have made the pursuit of thinness, bound up as it is with health, fitness, beauty, and discipline into a moralized endeavor: making the 'right' lifestyle choices to avoid being fat is seen as a duty we each must fulfill.

"Our collective aversion to fatness translates into an aversion to fat people. Fat people are bullied and harassed. They receive worse healthcare, frequently at the hands of doctors and nurses who endorse harmful anti-fat stereotypes. Fat students are ridiculed and teased by classmates and even teachers. In the workplace, fat people experience rampant discrimination, which is legal in most jurisdictions."

According to research cited in the book, global obesity rates have tripled during the past 50 years, while the World Health Organization has deemed childhood obesity "one of the most serious global public health challenges of the 21st century". Nath explains why, from a public health standpoint, this is worrisome, as severe obesity is linked to lower life expectancy, and carrying 'excess weight' (weight that places one above a 'normal' BMI) is associated with a heightened risk of diabetes and heart disease.

However, Nath explores further into the science of weight and health beyond headline figures, revealing a more complex picture. Surveying a body of scientific research, Nath shows that diet

and fitness may bear more on our health than weight alone. For instance, a 2010 systematic review of 36 studies found that fit, obese individuals were less likely to die prematurely than unfit normal-weight individuals.

Nath also points to evidence that advice dispensed to fat people to lose excess weight—eat less and move more—is ineffective and can even be harmful. According to one rigorous review, cited in the book, many people who try to lose weight through dieting end up heavier in the long run with 41% of dieters weighing more four to five years after dieting than they had before starting their diets.

Nath shows how many public health campaigns that aim to help people lose weight can make the situation worse by inadvertently stigmatizing fatness.

“The consensus view in the literature on weight stigma is that it doesn’t help. Actually, it’s worse than that,” she explains. “Not only does subjecting fat people to weight stigma seem to make it less likely that they will become thin, but, moreover, weight stigma appears to seriously harm their physical and mental health in many ways.”

Nath cites research showing that people who feel stigmatized are less likely to lose weight. In one study that tracked more than 6,000 individuals for four years, those who reported experiencing weight discrimination were more likely to become obese or remain obese than those who did not.

“Numerous studies indicate that people who experience weight stigma are more likely to suffer depression and low self-esteem,” she explains.

Nath writes that the prejudice experienced by fat people is stark and impacts their lives in tangible terms. She cites studies that reveal children as young as three show a preference for a playmate who ‘isn’t chubby’. And she says that a survey of over 800 American college students found that one in three agree with the claim that becoming obese would be “one of the worst things that could happen to a person.”

In the book, Nath imagines a world where fat people should enjoy equitable healthcare, equitable inclusion in the workforce, and the ability to appear in public without shame.

She says: “It is OK to be fat because there’s nothing wrong with being fat. There’s nothing wrong with being fat, of course, except for all that our society does to make it bad to be fat: oppressing fat people for their body size by imposing on them the gross injustice of sizeism.”

Further Information

Why It’s OK to Be Fat, by Rekha Nath (Routledge, 2024)

ISBN: Paperback: 9780367425456 | Hardback 9780367425494 | eBook 9780367853389 DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367853389>

About the author:

Rekha Nath is Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Alabama, USA. She works in moral and political philosophy.

About Taylor & Francis Group

Taylor & Francis supports diverse communities of experts, researchers and knowledge makers around the world to accelerate and maximize the impact of their work. We are a leader in our field, publish across all disciplines and have one of the largest Humanities and Social Sciences portfolios. Our expertise, built on an academic publishing heritage of over 200 years, advances trusted knowledge that fosters human progress.

Our 2,500+ people, based in a global network of offices in more than 15 countries, use their skills and the latest technology to curate, validate and share impactful advanced, emergent and applied knowledge. Under the Taylor & Francis, Routledge and F1000 imprints we publish 2,700 journals, 8,000 new books each year and partner with more than 700 scholarly societies.

Taylor & Francis is proud to be a Global Certified Accessible™ publisher and our operations and all our print publications are certified CarbonNeutral®.

***** ENDS *****

Rebecca Parker-Ellis

Taylor & Francis

+44 7818911310

[email us here](#)

This press release can be viewed online at: <https://www.einpresswire.com/article/725961270>

EIN Presswire's priority is source transparency. We do not allow opaque clients, and our editors try to be careful about weeding out false and misleading content. As a user, if you see something we have missed, please do bring it to our attention. Your help is welcome. EIN Presswire, Everyone's Internet News Presswire™, tries to define some of the boundaries that are reasonable in today's world. Please see our Editorial Guidelines for more information.

© 1995-2024 Newsmatics Inc. All Right Reserved.