

Sizing Up Gender-Based Violence Services: Identifying and Dismantling Weight - Based Discrimination

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Your Presenters



Kelsey Ioannoni , Ph.D., (she/her) is a fat solo mom and a sociologist who explores the way that body size, specifically fatness, impacts the ability of fat Canadian women to access health care services . Her research interests are centred around the fat body, weight -based politics, and weight -based discrimination .

Her current research looks at the ways in which fat Canadian women understand their bodies through the lens of the ‘obesity epidemic’, and this lens results in the antagonistic relationships with their bodies. These feelings carry over to health care spaces where practitioners often hold anti-fat bias, resulting in weight -based discrimination and experiences of fatphobia in health care. Moving forward, Kelsey is passionate about investigating the ways in which fat women experience discrimination related to reproductive health and access to reproductive assistance .

Ramanpreet Annie Bahra (she/her) is a PhD student in the Sociology department at York University, Canada. Her research concentrates on social theory, fat studies and disability studies as she examines intersectional experiences of the body, embodiment and affect within the South Asian diaspora using research -creation methodological practices .

Additionally, she utilizes feminist pedagogical practices rooted in social justice principles to explore how engaged pedagogy and acts of emotionality can challenge neoliberal mandates of post-secondary education . Ramanpreet is one of the co-editors of the anthology, *Fat Studies in Canada: (Re)Mapping the Field*, Junior Fellow with the Centre of Fat Liberation and Scholarship ; and the co-manager-in-chief for *Excessive Bodies: A Journal of Artistic and Critical Fat Praxis and Worldmaking* .



Learning Objectives

This webinar will empower attendees to:

- Understand key concepts relating to weight-based discrimination (what we will frame as fat oppression) and how weight-based discrimination constrains the lives of larger bodied people.
- Identify key barriers to gender-based violence services that larger bodied people often experience as a result of weight-based discrimination as it intersects with gender, sexuality, race, and disability.
- Advocate for and create more accessible gender-based violence services by considering larger bodied people's lived experiences of marginalization on the basis of body size, gender, sexuality, race, and disability.

Our Use of Fat, Racialized, Disabled People

- In our learning objectives, we have used “larger bodied people”; however, we will actually be using the term **fat, racialized, and disabled people** throughout this webinar .
- It recognizes how bodies are in a process and the use of this language speaks to the ways in which these differences are a positive factor in one’s life .
- The (bio)medical model has used technologies such as the BMI scale to denote fat bodies to the status of ‘obese’, ‘overweight’, or ‘normal’ weight . Fat studies problematizes these medical terms and the way it came to enact this idea of individual pathology .
- A shift from “people living with (ie . obesity, disability)” to people first approach .

Disability & Fat Justice: An Intersectional Lens

- Intersectionality (The CR Collective ; Crenshaw ; Collins) is a framework which provides insight on how violence against women is not simply a gendered phenomenon ; instead, it intersects with fatness, disability race, class and other social locations . It comes to then produce specific experiences of violence for different women . In taking on a single-axis analysis it erases the complexity of our intersectional lives .

Disability & Fat Justice: An Intersectional Lens

- Fat studies uses this framework to deeply examine the body as a social issue, as it intersects with body size, shape, weight, gender, sexuality, race, and disability (Cameron & Russell 2016, 2). It critically examines the negative associations society has about fatness within the context of gender, race, etc. in the larger experience of fat oppression and the question of who benefits is also interrogated (Rothblum 2011, 173).
- As a tenant of Disability Justice movements, the praxis shares: “[T]here is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives” (Kafai 2022, 21). We all experience privilege and oppression, so an intersectional lens within such movements acknowledges the heterogeneous realities of marginalized bodies.

What is Fat Oppression and Weight -Based Discrimination

- **Weight Stigma / Anti -Fat Bias:** “The terms weight stigma, weight bias, and anti -fat bias all refer to the social rejection and/or devaluation based on having a body size that does not conform to social norms or expectations (Tomiya et al., 2018). Weight stigma can be explicit and conscious or implicit and outside of awareness” (Ellis-Ordway, 2021, p. 72).
- **Fat Studies:** “An interdisciplinary field of scholarship marked by an aggressive, consistent, rigorous critique of the negative assumptions, stereotypes and stigma placed on fat and the fat body” (Solovay and Rothblum, 2009, p. 2).
- **Fat Oppression and Sizeism:** Founded by society’s negative expectations of fat as the pathological permeates all aspects of the lived experience of fat people and their interaction with social institutions. For instance, fat people face discrimination and have unequal access to resources, including resources that would be beneficial to their health and their lived experience (LeBesco 2004: 34).

Healthism and Access to 'Health'

Kristin : We regularly ignore health things because we don't want to know or because it's an inconvenience but it's just another factor on top of that is I don't want my doctor to just ignore something very serious because well, it's just your weight . Why even bother? Why waste my time? Why would I waste my time just to be told that it's because you're fat.

- The stigma attached to being in a fat body is unmistakable in health care settings
 - Results in fat women's internalization of shame around their very existence
- When healthcare professionals make assumptions about their patients on the basis of body size, this can cause harm to the patient themselves
- Anti-fat attitudes held by health care professionals, especially primary care physicians, result in weight -based discrimination
- Healthism = space to justify medical fat shaming + the use of shame in effort to motivate fat patients to lose weight?

**Health at every size movement (HAES)
focuses on weight inclusivity, respectful
care by acknowledging our biases;
health enhancement; life -enhancing
movement**

Gender -Based Violence on Basis of Fatness

- Gender-based violence takes on different forms (ie., physical, emotional, etc.) largely experienced at a high rate by women, girls, and Two Spirit, trans and non-binary people . It can occur in intimate relationships, kinship circles, work, strangers, etc .
 - Examples: name-calling, hitting, pushing, blocking, stalking/criminal harassment, sexual assault, control, and manipulation .
 - “44% of women who had ever been in an intimate partner relationship —or about 6.2 million women aged 15 and over—reported experiencing some kind of psychological, physical, or sexual abuse in the context of an intimate relationship in their lifetime (since the age of 15)” (Government of Canada, 2022)
 - It is a human rights issue!
- Folks across the intersections of race, disability and fatness are at an even higher risk due to the barriers of racism, ableism, sizeism, and heteronormativity, and may not have access to support systems .
- There is limited research on gender -based violence and fatness .
 - Societal anti-fat prejudices (linked to desirability, de-feminization and asexualization of fat bodies) are deployed in gender -based violence (Royce, 2009).

Gender -Based Violence and its Various Forms

- Gender-based violence intersecting with the violence of fat oppression utilizes fatphobic language and anti-fat cultural tropes, thus maintaining a politics of domination in society .
- There is an increased vulnerability due to anti-fat biases as fat people at points of intersections of racialization, disability, and/or gender attempt to gain access to social support systems like family, healthcare or legal. In most cases, this is very limited .
- The circulation of fat oppression within institutions, like healthcare, at the macro level and interpersonal relationships at the micro level comes to deter fat folks from seeking support due to the invalidation of their stories and experiences and the denial of support .
- We will be using the example(s) of Sally in the infographic resource shared to illustrate how intimate partner violence is compounded with discriminatory practices of sizeism .

Sally's Experience – Part 1



Sally's partner, Riley, told her how lucky she was to be with him because she was "so fat." He often threw out her food or limited her meal portions. Riley started to hit Sally and locked her out of the house telling her to "go for a walk."

Click here for the full Learning Network infographic on ["Experiences of Weight -Based Discrimination & Violence."](#)

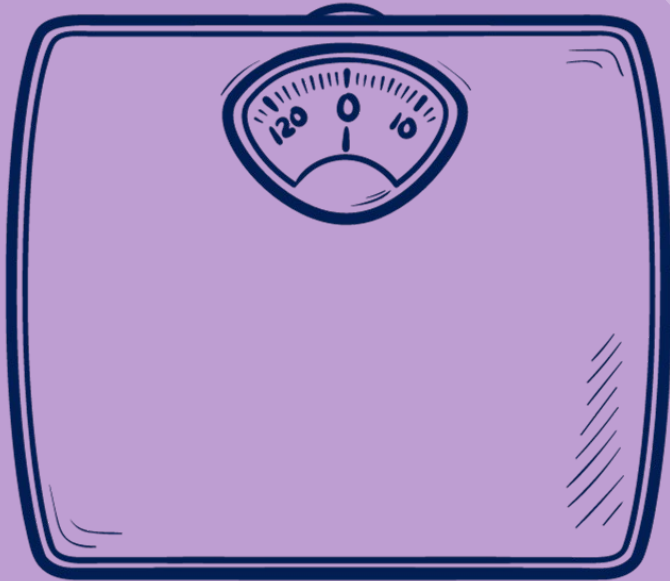
The Abuse of Fat Shaming

- The individual -deficit model and the discourse of healthism pathologize and mark fat people as a cause of their fatness and therefore deserving of the violence incurred onto them .
- The fat gendered, racialized and/or disabled body is framed as lacking control, lazy and immoral. Such positioning of fat people as 'the Other' enables this politics of domination to take a form of control through practices of fat shaming and mistreating them .
- In sizeism and shapeism, we see thinness, attractiveness and the hour-glass shape become a discourse in which we come to learn of an archetype of femininity and perform it.

The Abuse of Fat Shaming

- Fat women are routinely told that if they leave, they will not be able to find another partner because they are not attractive enough (Royce, 2009).
- Within intimate -partner violence, this is intensified by the excessive use of fatphobic language and harmful techniques of 'lifestyle' changes that are forced upon fat women. There is a form of victim -blaming, as it is believed by the perpetrator that they are in fact helping their fat partner to become thin.
- Fat shaming as a form of verbal and emotional abuse is consistent with little to no self-esteem, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and barriers to exit abusive relationships (Royce, 2009).

Sally's Experience – Part 2



Sally's family often witnessed Riley's behaviour and would reassure her that he was just concerned about her health. They encouraged her to try dieting since "she would be so beautiful if she just lost a few pounds."

Click here for the full Learning Network infographic on ["Experiences of Weight -Based Discrimination & Violence."](#)

Diet Culture = Family -Wide Surveillance

- **Jane:** *[The doctor] would tell my mom and not tell me, and give my mom stuff for me to eat and not tell me. Making my mom in control of this, so that it's not my responsibility, it's my mom's responsibility ... I didn't have a choice [to diet]. My mom was the one who was giving me food, right? [laughs] I was never allowed [food] because my mom didn't allow me. My brothers were allowed to go and grab snacks or whatever and mine would be arranged. She used to give them dessert after I went to bed, but I blatantly knew what was going on because this was the doctor's recommendation. **She put bells on the food room** [emphasis added], so when you opened it she could hear ... It was horrible. I felt so bad about myself growing up.*
- **Brielle :** *Until I moved out, my parents would always be with me to doctor appointments or whatever and they would always bring it up or my doctor would bring it up. I never needed to bring up my weight because other people would always bring it up for me.*
- Diet culture creates family -wide surveillance (Rashatwar, 2021) -> further demonstrated in Sally's experience with her mother

Sally's Experience – Part 3



Sally went to see a doctor after Riley pushed her down the stairs and she began having intense migraines. The doctor asked if she tripped since she “doesn’t move around a lot” and said the real concern was getting Sally’s weight “under control.”

Click here for the full Learning Network infographic on [“Experiences of Weight -Based Discrimination & Violence.”](#)

Contextualizing Embodied Fat Experience

- **Hyper(in)visibility** – Gailey (2014):
 - Paradoxical!: The fat body as hyper visible and publicly dissected, but also hyper invisible in that fat people experience marginalization, oppression, and erasure based on their size.
- **‘Forced Confession’** – Murray (2008):
 - The thin body is read and understood as the healthy body.
 - The fat body is seen as ‘immoral’ subjects, and by virtue of their visible fatness they are confessing to such immorality.
- **Disciplinary Medicine** - Murray (2008):
 - The use of morality to enforce control and regulation over people’s understandings of their personal responsibility for their weight.
 - Illusion of personal choice.

Doctor versus Patient: A Harmful Relationship

Rachel : *[The doctor] had this lovely story about his wife, about how she essentially starved herself and that's how she was able to lose weight and keep it off.*

You have to negotiate between 'Do I want to be told that I'm fat and lousy and pathetic' or 'do I want to sit at home and be sick for a while longer.'

Olivia : *It makes you lose trust in the doctors. It makes you feel like you're getting second rate service because you're fat. In the back of my mind even though I know it's not true it starts to reinforce that idea that maybe it is true. I'm like, "I worked really hard not to feel that way and you're just pushing it into me and it's really frustrating."*

Social Justice Praxis: A Move Towards Accessibility

- A social justice praxis prioritizes access, human rights, equity and participation of marginalized communities in the fabrics of society .
- Step away from the individual-deficit model and instead recognize the social model of disability and the ways in which society comes to create systems of dominance and experiences of marginalization at both the level of institution and interpersonal relations .
- Collective Access advocates for social spaces to be more accessible of fat people experiencing gender-based violence . This is a call for organizations to provide knowledge, strategies and spaces for folks to learn of how they prioritize their well-being .

Social Justice Praxis: A Move Towards Accessibility

- There needs to be a call on the government to include fatness as a social location in the experience of social inequality in section 15 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and future Statistics Canada Research to grasp a breath of knowledge and rates on fat and gender-based oppression .
- Seeing that the research is very limited, it is imperative that scholars and organizations carry out more research on the intersectional forms of violence experienced by fat people . This will create opportunities for the narratives of fat shame to be validated, while also re-humanizing them when seeking access to 'health', justice system and other social support systems .

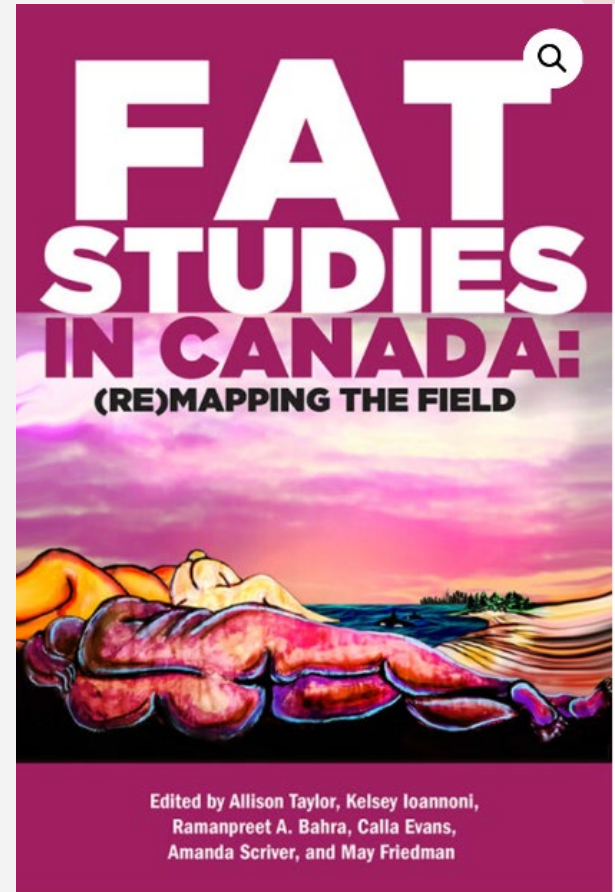
Thank you!

Raman: Interested in connecting over fat studies, disability studies, critical race studies, access to healthcare, and politics of affirmation using research-creation practices(ie. art)? Reach out!
Email: rbahra@yorku.ca

Kelsey: Interested in connecting over fat studies, reproductive health, access to reproductive assistance, and/or fat motherhood? Reach out!
Email: kelseyi@yorku.ca

Raman, Kelsey and colleagues recently published an edited collection on [Fat Studies in Canada](#), if this is an area of interest to you, consider checking it out (it is likely an e-book on the Western Library!)

Raman and Kelsey co-manage a new journal [Excessive Bodies: A Journal of Artistic and Critical Fat Praxis and Worldmaking](#)



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used today?**

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