

Fat Shaming Can Lead To Weight Gain -- Now Can We Stop The Bullying?

The Huffington Post | By Margaret Wheeler Johnson

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Fat discrimination and prejudice are everywhere -- at [work](#), in [dating situations](#), in [media](#) (we are not over it, [Rex Reed](#)), in [think tanks](#), in [academia](#) and on [the street](#). (Don't believe it? Read [these women's stories](#).) It persists in part thanks to the myth that this type of bullying has an admirable purpose -- to shame people into losing weight.

Finally, science is echoing what body image bloggers and other advocates have said for years: [shame](#) doesn't [inspire](#) anyone to change.

In 2006 and again in 2010, a new [study, led by psychologist Angelina Sutin](#) at the Florida State University College of Medicine in Tallahassee, Fla., collected the body mass indexes of 6,157 Americans ages 50 and over who were either normal weight, overweight or obese, Today reported. The research team found that [overweight people who faced weight discrimination](#) were over two times more likely to become obese by the end of the study. Participants who were obese when the study began and had experienced weight discrimination were three times more likely to still be obese in 2010. "Rather than motivating individuals to lose weight, [weight discrimination increases risk for obesity](#)," Sutin summarized her findings.

[Art Caplan](#), the head of the Division of Medical Ethics at NYU Langone Medical Center, told Today that the study is evidence that there is no easy fix for our weight issues, least of all the fat shaming that happens all the time. "Many people, from your sister-in-law to ethics professors, think that the road to weight control runs directly through shame and humiliation," Caplan said. "Common sense says that this is not likely to be true... Obesity remains a complex problem -- part choice and free will mixed in with a smidgen of genetics, sedentary lifestyles and a whole lot of promotion and advertising of fast food, sugary food, high-caloric food and junk food," he said.

As Today and Caplan also note, it doesn't help that at least one ethicist -- a person who studies right and wrong -- has [encouraged fat shaming](#). (By way of an analogy about ageism, the ethicist in question, 83-year-old [Daniel Callahan](#), suggested to Today that fat people imagine weight discrimination.)

What Caplan didn't mention is the role that what National Eating Disorder Association spokesperson and The Frisky blogger Claire Mysko calls "[the Diet Industrial Complex](#)" plays in individuals' and society's struggle with weight.

The [weight loss industry pulls in \\$20 billion annually](#), positioning itself as the solution to our weight woes, but as Geneen Roth, author of "[Breaking Free from Emotional Eating](#)," has emphasized again and again, diets are likely part of the problem. They teach people that they don't know how to feed themselves and that they deserve deprivation. They're inherently shaming, and then there's the inconvenient truth that [diets often result in weight gain](#) down the road.

What anyone who eats more than he or she needs and feels bad about it needs to do is tune in to exactly what she or he wants and how much. That's the only way you learn to recognize and honor when you're full.

Earlier this year, Mysko beautifully summed up [what overweight people don't need](#):

it is safe to say that a fat woman who struggles with her weight and body image will not find vicious name-calling or cruel jokes to be just the motivation she needs to stick to that magic diet (you know, the one that's going to screw up her metabolism and make her even more likely to binge and obsess over food)

With any luck, more studies like Sutin's and the press they receive will finally end the idea that you can shame someone thin. Not that shaming anyone for anything, no matter how justified you feel, has ever actually been okay. If you're being mean, you're just being mean.