

# IS WEIGHT SOMETHING WE INHERIT? AND STIGMA: THE HUMAN COST OF OBESITY



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*This section of the toolkit is centered on two different Weight of the Nation Bonus Shorts, *Is Weight Something We Inherit?* and *Stigma: The Human Cost of Obesity*. The aim of this section is to draw attention to the very personal side of obesity: exploring the genetic, biological and psychological aspects of weight. The two videos that are featured in this section can be shown together during one screening, or shown individually at separate screenings.*

## About this section

The bonus short, *Is Weight Something We Inherit?* (11 minutes) addresses the age old question of nature vs. nurture - exploring the interplay between genetics, biology and our current environment. This video helps explain why some individuals are more prone to obesity and why the heaviest individuals tend to gain weight at increasing rates. *Is Weight Something We Inherit?* provides hope for those who may feel that the weight genes are stacked against them, offering practical tips for obesity prevention and achieving a healthy lifestyle.

The bonus short, *Stigma: The Human Cost of Obesity* (19 minutes) exposes the prejudice, stereo-typing and weight bias experienced by obese individuals. This bonus short draws from testimonials of the individuals interviewed throughout the *Weight of the Nation* series. These men and women share some of their most private feelings about the stigma of being obese. Their stories are candid and often heartbreaking. This video calls out obesity prejudice as the current most tolerated social bias. Those working in health care are not exempt; this video and the resources included below, address the surprising extent of weight bias among health care professionals. Clearly, social stigma is one of the most devastating aspects of obesity.

Before beginning the screening, set ground rules that create a respectful and safe environment for all screening participants:

Be respectful of all members in the audience:

Food, eating, weight, and body image are personal issues. Stereotypes, bias, and prejudice are also very personal. While some members of the audience may have had their own personal experiences as victims of discrimination, others may be coming to terms with their own biases. These topics may bring up many sensitive issues for screening participants.

Move through the personal to the public health perspective:

The focus of the *Weight of the Nation Series* and this toolkit is population-based rather than individual-based, but participants may need to process their personal feelings before they can move on to addressing the public health perspective. Acknowledge this before the screening and encourage attendees to hold personal stories to a minimum, encouraging instead, conversations that focus on prevention and support.

# Leveraging the Weight of the Nation

## Is Weight Something We Inherit?

### Stigma: The Human Cost of Obesity

Watch these bonus shorts as a group along with your public health colleagues and community partners - schedule a conference room, invite your colleagues working to promote health and participate in our state-local conversation! Together, you'll build a common foundation of knowledge, share ideas and perspectives, and foster collaboration.

*Is Weight Something We Inherit?* is 11 minutes long and *Stigma: the Human Cost of Obesity* is 19 minutes

*Suggested discussion questions:*

#### *Is Weight Something We Inherit?*

1. What were your assumptions about the causes of obesity before seeing this film? Did the information presented by Dr. Altshuler change your assumptions?
2. How did this film affect your perceptions about obesity and personal behavior?
3. What sort of genetic hand do you think you were dealt? What could you do to play that hand better?

#### *Stigma: The Human Cost of Obesity*

1. Have you ever experienced any form of appearance-based prejudice? How did that make you feel?
2. What can we do to combat this prejudice? How can we carry what we've learned to help others understand how unacceptable this prejudice is?
3. Often times we don't recognize our own biases. Did this film cause you to recognize or acknowledge any of your own biases? How and why were they established? What can you do to lessen their strength?

## Key Data Facts

- » The prevalence of weight discrimination in the United States has increased by 66% over the past decade.
- » 72% of photographs paired with online news stories about obesity are stigmatizing toward obese individuals. Additionally, 65% of videos paired with online news stories about obesity stigmatize overweight/obese adults and 77% of videos stigmatize overweight/obese youth.



## Did You Know?

- » Weight stigma is not a beneficial public health tool for reducing obesity. Rather, stigmatizing obese individuals threatens health, generates health disparities and interferes with effective obesity intervention efforts.
- » Currently, there are no federal laws that prohibit discrimination against obese and overweight people in the workplace. Michigan is the only state with an anti-discrimination law on its books
- » Legislators in Massachusetts, Nevada, and Oregon filed weight bias bills in 2009.
- » One study of more than 620 primary care physicians found that more than 50% of them viewed obese patients as awkward, unattractive, ugly and noncompliant. One-third of the sample further characterized obese patients as weak-willed, sloppy and lazy. Physicians also viewed obesity as largely a behavioral problem caused by physical inactivity and overeating.
- » A 2008 article in Newsweek titled "The Obese Should Have to Pay More for Airline Tickets," offhandedly joked about "drilling fat people for fuel."



# Definitions

Certain key terms are used throughout the bonus short and toolkit. Below are a set of definitions that outline the intended meaning and scope of these terms.

**Discrimination** is behavior that treats people unequally because of their group memberships. Discriminatory behavior, ranging from slights to hate crimes, often begins with negative stereotypes and prejudices.



**Prejudice** is an opinion or attitude about a group or its individual members. A prejudice can be positive, but in our usage refers to a negative attitude. Prejudices are often accompanied by ignorance, fear or hatred. Prejudice literally means prejudgment.

**Stereotype** is an exaggerated belief, image or distorted truth about a person or group - a generalization that allows for little or no individual differences or social variation. Stereotypes are based on images in mass media, or reputations passed on by parents, peers and other members of society. Stereotypes can be positive or negative.

**Social stigma** is the extreme disapproval of a person on the grounds of characteristics that distinguish them from other members of a society. Stigma may attach to a person who differs from social or cultural norms.

# Resources

## Obesity and Genetics

- » **Addressing the Obesity Epidemic: A Genomics Perspective:**  
**A Newell, A Zlot, K Silvey, K Ariail**  
*[http://www.public.health.oregon.gov/DiseasesConditions/GeneticConditions/Documents/PR\\_AddressingObesity.pdf](http://www.public.health.oregon.gov/DiseasesConditions/GeneticConditions/Documents/PR_AddressingObesity.pdf)*
- » **Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Features:**  
**Obesity and Genetics** *<http://www.cdc.gov/features/obesity/>*
- » **Association for Size Diversity and Health**  
*<https://www.sizediversityandhealth.org/content.asp?id=76>*

## Obesity Stigma:

- » **Weight Bias and Stigma: Yale Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity** *[http://www.yaleruddcenter.org/what\\_we\\_do.aspx?id=10](http://www.yaleruddcenter.org/what_we_do.aspx?id=10)*

## Combating Weight Bias in the Media:

- » **Guidelines for the Portrayal of Obese Persons in the Media**  
*[http://www.yaleruddcenter.org/resources/upload/docs/what/bias/media/MediaGuidelines\\_PortrayalObese.pdf](http://www.yaleruddcenter.org/resources/upload/docs/what/bias/media/MediaGuidelines_PortrayalObese.pdf)*
- » **Rudd Center Image Gallery**  
A collection of photographs that portray obese individuals in ways that are positive and non-stereotypical. These images provide a fair and non-biased representation of youth and adults who are overweight and obese.  
*[http://www.yaleruddcenter.org/press/image\\_gallery\\_intro.aspx](http://www.yaleruddcenter.org/press/image_gallery_intro.aspx)*

## Weight Bias in Health Care:

- » **Weight Bias in Health Care - YouTube** *<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IZLzHFgE0AQ>*
- » **Continuing Medical Education (CME) for Health Care Providers - Weight Bias in Clinical Settings: Improving Health Care Delivery for Obese Patients** *<http://learn.yale.edu/rudd/weightbias/login.asp?ec=60852>*
- » **Online Tool Kit Helping without Harming in Clinical Practice**  
*[http://www.yaleruddcenter.org/resources/bias\\_toolkit/index.html](http://www.yaleruddcenter.org/resources/bias_toolkit/index.html)*

## Scholarly Articles

- » **Obesity Stigma: Important Considerations for Public Health:** R Pulh [http://www.yaleruddcenter.org/resources/upload/docs/what/bias/ObesityStigmaPublicHealth\\_AJPH\\_6.10.pdf](http://www.yaleruddcenter.org/resources/upload/docs/what/bias/ObesityStigmaPublicHealth_AJPH_6.10.pdf)
- » **Stigma, Obesity, and the Health of the Nation's Children:** R Pulh, J Latner <http://www.nichq.org/pdf/PsychBUL%20Rebecca%20Puhl.pdf>
- » **The Stigma of Obesity: Does Perceived Weight Discrimination affect Identity and Physical Health?:** M Schafer, K Ferraro <http://spq.sagepub.com/content/74/1/76.abstract>
- » **Popular Press: The Obesity Stigma,** Huffington Post Blog, Judith Wurtman [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/judith-j-wurtman-phd/the-obesity-stigma\\_b\\_843205.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/judith-j-wurtman-phd/the-obesity-stigma_b_843205.html)
- » **TV anchor blasts viewer who complained about her weight** <http://www.usatoday.com/story/ondeadline/2012/10/02/wisconsin-tv-anchor-weight-response-bully/1609319/>



## Key Policy References

- » **2012 Rudd Report - Weight Bias: A Social Justice issue - A Policy Brief** [http://www.yaleruddcenter.org/resources/upload/docs/what/reports/Rudd\\_Policy\\_Brief\\_Weight\\_Bias.pdf](http://www.yaleruddcenter.org/resources/upload/docs/what/reports/Rudd_Policy_Brief_Weight_Bias.pdf)

## Policy Recommendations

To improve working conditions, healthcare and overall quality of life for millions of Americans include weight on the list of categories that are covered in antidiscrimination laws. This can be accomplished on a federal, state or local level.

[http://www.yaleruddcenter.org/resources/upload/docs/what/reports/Rudd\\_Policy\\_Brief\\_Weight\\_Bias.pdf](http://www.yaleruddcenter.org/resources/upload/docs/what/reports/Rudd_Policy_Brief_Weight_Bias.pdf)

### » **In employment**

Include weight in the Civil Rights Act or create separate federal anti-discrimination legislation based on weight.

### » **In health care**

Encourage health care organizations to include language on weight bias in their patients' rights policies and require weight bias training for all health care professionals.

### » **In schools**

Protect overweight and obese children from bullying and intimidation in school by requiring states and/or school districts to adopt and enforce policies prohibiting harassment, intimidation or bullying on school property. Include weight as a specific protected category.



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