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Weight Stigma in the Media and Workplace

Dr Stuart W. Flint

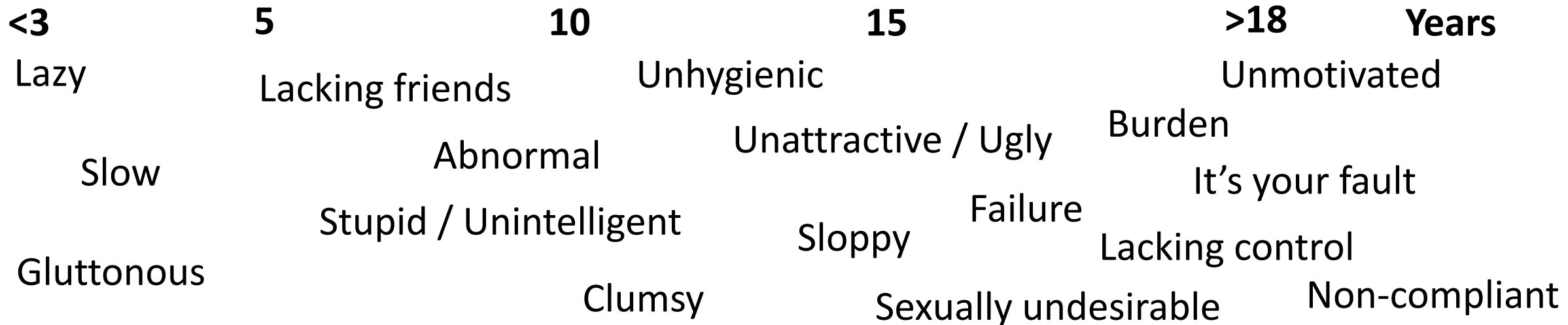
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Media Portrayal is Insidious



(Baker et al., 2020; Eisenberg et al., 2015; Greenberg et al., 2003; Flint & Reale, 2016; Hall et al., 2016; Heuer et al., 2011; Puhl & Brownell, 2001; Kato et al., 2016; Lui et al., 2017; Lydecker et al., 2016; Nutter & Saunders, 2023; Pont et al., 2017; Tang-Péronard & Heitmann, 2008; Tischner & Malson, 2008; Yoo, 2013)

Ill-alignment with empirical evidence



- Increased coverage of obesity
- Media focus on childhood obesity
- Portrayal of obesity as simple
- Individual (parent) behaviour based “solutions”

Media messages aimed to shame and disgrace parents of CYP with obesity through use of emotive and evocative language

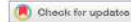


(Butland et al., 2007; Foresight Report)

Media Portrayal of Interventions

HEALTH COMMUNICATION
2023, VOL. 38, NO. 14, 3238–3242
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2022.2144303>

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group



Twitter and Communicating Stigma about Medications to Treat Obesity

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DEVIANT BEHAVIOR
2018, VOL. 39, NO. 2, 137–147
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01639625.2016.1263081>

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group

Damned if You Do, Damned if You Don't: The Stigma of Weight Loss Surgery

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^aUniversity of Alabama, Birmingham, Birmingham, Alabama, USA; ^bMiddle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee, USA

OBES SURG (2013) 23:1545–1550
DOI 10.1007/s11695-013-0918-y

ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTIONS



The Stigma of Obesity Surgery: Negative Evaluations Based on Weight Loss History

Lenny R. Vartanian · Jasmine Fardouly

MailOnline

Are 'miracle' fat-melting shots loved by celebrities all they're cracked up to be? MANSUR SHAHEEN reveals everything you need to know about Wegovy - the 'game-changer' drug everyone's talking about

By MANSUR SHAHEEN DEPUTY HEALTH EDITOR FOR DAILYMAIL.COM
UPDATED: 17:31, 22 November 2022

“Quick Fix”

“Easy Way Out”

“Weight loss pill”

“Miracle weight loss drug”



“...losing some extra fat” and to “get ‘fit, ripped and healthy’” (Elon Musk)

Workplace Stigma & Discrimination



1988: Doctor of Medicine, Surgery and Obstetrics – High Distinction (Free University of Brussels)

1991 to present: Certified General Practitioner

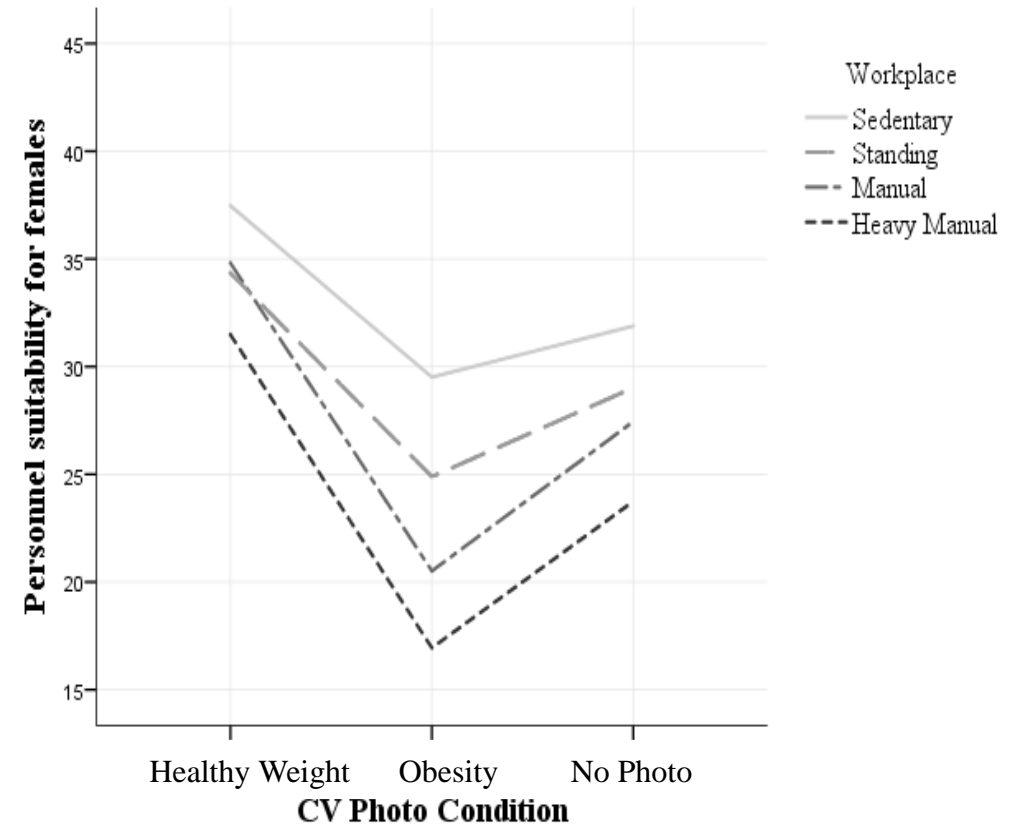
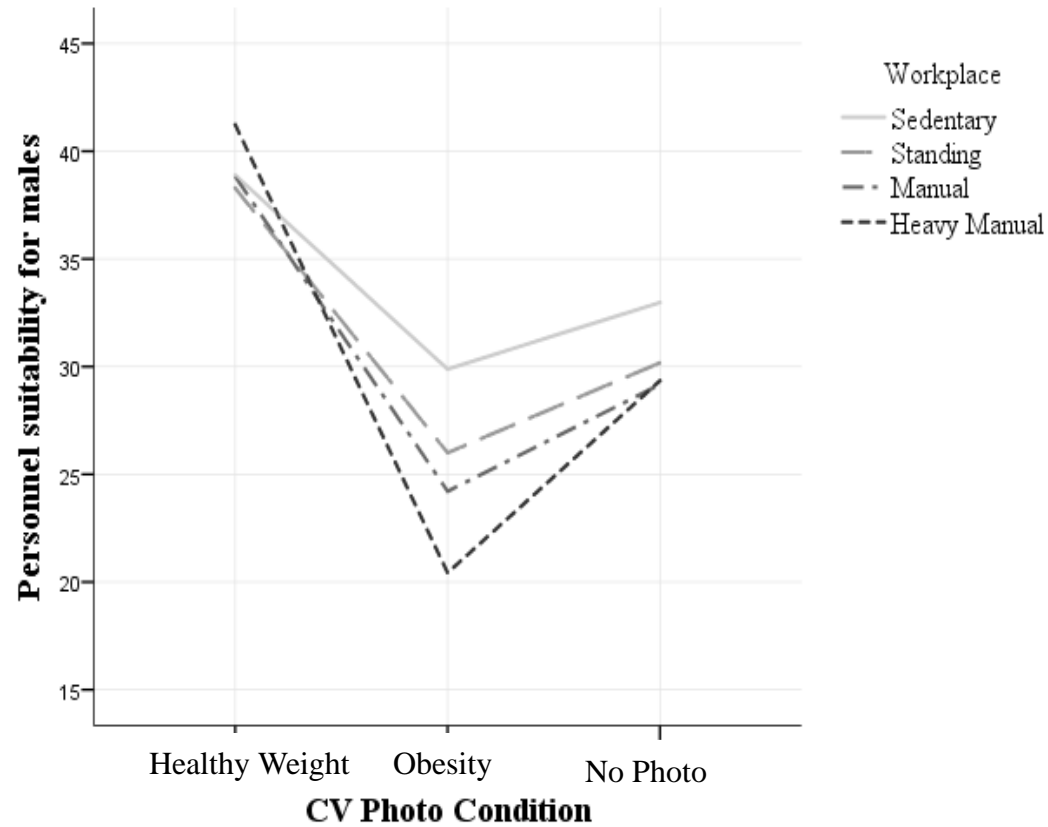
Compared to people within the healthy weight range:

- PLWO are perceived as having less leadership qualities
- PLWO performing the same job, receive a lower salary
- PLWO expected to work longer hours
- Experiences of weight stigma can lead to disengagement, low staff satisfaction, and increased absenteeism.



Obesity Discrimination in the Recruitment Process: “You’re Not Hired!”

Stuart W. Flint^{1,2*}, Martin Čadež³, Sonia C. Codreanu⁴, Vanja Ivić⁵, Colene Zomer⁶ and Amalia Gomoiu⁷



Problem

Media portrayal contributes to the formation of weight stigma attitudes and behaviours



Solution

Respectful, accurate media portrayal that improves public understanding

Weight stigma and discrimination: a call to the media

Stuart W Flint [✉](#) • James Nobles • Paul Gately • Pinki Sahota • Association for the Study of Obesity • Obesity Empowerment Network • et al. [Show all authors](#)

Published: March, 2018 • DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2213-8587\(18\)30041-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2213-8587(18)30041-X)

- Panel

Challenging the role of the media in weight stigma and discrimination

We call on the media to

- Adhere to the national journalism societies such as the Society of Professional Journalists code of ethics,¹⁰ which states that journalists should avoid stereotyping and examine the ways in which their values might shape their reporting, and the National Union of Journalists code of conduct,¹¹ which emphasises that journalists should not produce material likely to lead to hatred or discrimination
- Accurately portray obesity
- Refrain from publishing articles that stigmatise and discriminate against people with obesity
- Use non-stigmatising images when reporting on obesity
- Take the opportunity—where stigma and discrimination are reported—to condemn such behaviour, as has been done for other topics (eg, mental health)



Is accuracy and respect too
much to ask for?

Is Legislative Action Needed?



Equality Act 2010

Direct Discrimination

This means treating one person worse than another person because of a protected characteristic.

Indirect Discrimination

This can happen when an organisation puts a rule or a policy or a way of doing things in place which has a worse impact on someone with a protected characteristic than someone without one.

Harassment

This means people cannot treat you in a way that violates your dignity, or creates a hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment.

Victimisation

This means people cannot treat you unfairly if you are taking action under the Equality Act (like making a complaint of discrimination), or if you are supporting someone else who is doing so.

The Great Lakes State included weight as a protected civil rights category in the Elliot-Larson Civil Rights Act passed in 1976 **(Michigan State, USA)**

Discrimination against people on the basis of physique, appearance, or body form. Everyone's contribution shall be evaluated based on its merit regardless of height, weight, or appearance. Reykjavík City maintains that prejudice and discrimination relating to physique is a social injustice that must be fought **(The Reykjavík City Human Rights Policy)**

Weight Stigma Training / Education



Equality and Inclusion



elfh
elearning for healthcare

Office for Health
Improvement
& Disparities

NHS
Health Education England

Healthy Weight Coach

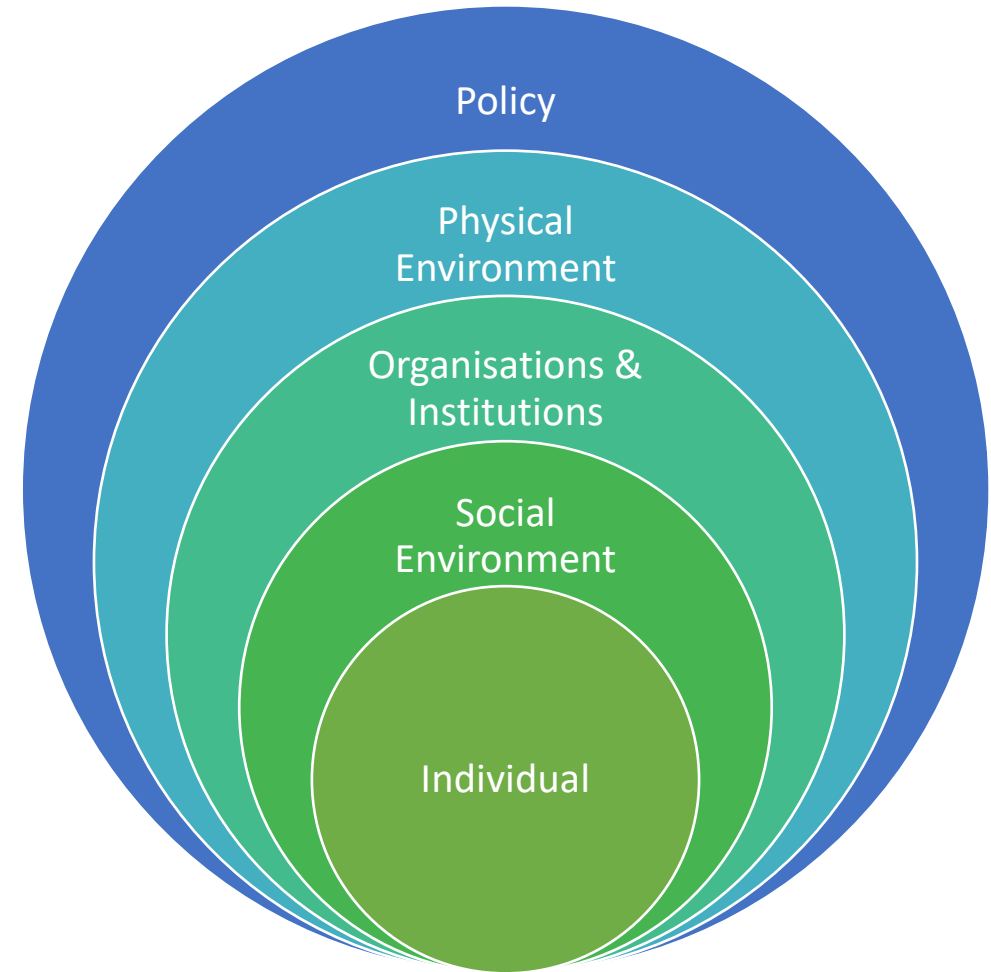
Free elearning to support those living with overweight or obesity



Statutory and Mandatory Training

Summary

- A **whole systems approach** is needed
- Media are a key contributor to the pervasiveness of weight stigma and discrimination
- **But** media also have a key role in reducing weight stigma
- Weight stigma in the workplace has direct and indirect effects
- Addressing weight stigma in workplaces can lead to wide benefits



Selected References

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