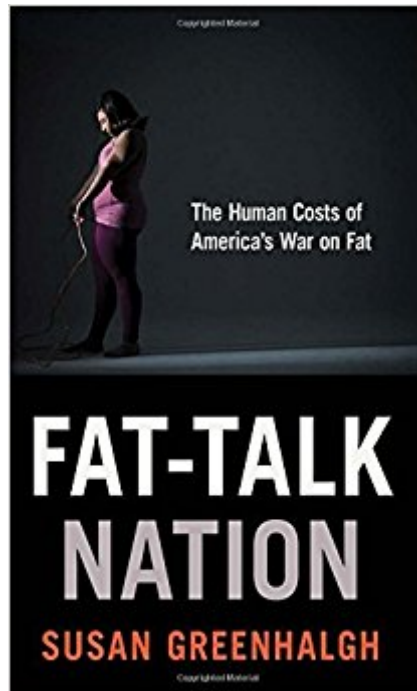




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Fat-Talk Nation: The Human Costs Of America's War On Fat



Synopsis

In recent decades, America has been waging a veritable war on fat in which not just public health authorities, but every sector of society is engaged in constant “fat talk” aimed at educating, badgering, and ridiculing heavy people into shedding pounds. We hear a great deal about the dangers of fatness to the nation, but little about the dangers of today’s epidemic of fat talk to individuals and society at large. The human trauma caused by the war on fat is disturbing and it is virtually unknown. How do those who do not fit the “ideal” body type feel being the object of abuse, discrimination, and even revulsion? How do people feel being told they are a burden on the healthcare system for having a BMI outside what is deemed “healthy”? How do young people, already prone to self-doubt about their bodies, withstand the daily assault on their body type and sense of self-worth? In *Fat-Talk Nation*, Susan Greenhalgh tells the story of today’s fight against excess pounds by giving young people, the campaign’s main target, an opportunity to speak about experiences that have long lain hidden in silence and shame. Featuring forty-five autobiographical narratives of personal struggles with diet, weight, “bad BMIs” and eating disorders, *Fat-Talk Nation* shows how the war on fat has produced a generation of young people who are obsessed with their bodies and whose most fundamental sense of self comes from their size. It reveals that regardless of their weight, many people feel miserable about their bodies, and almost no one is able to lose weight and keep it off. Greenhalgh argues that attempts to rescue America from obesity-induced national decline are damaging the bodily and emotional health of young people and disrupting families and intimate relationships. Fatness today is not primarily about health, Greenhalgh asserts; more fundamentally, it is about morality and political inclusion/exclusion or citizenship. To unpack the complexity of fat politics today, Greenhalgh introduces a cluster of terms: biocitizen, biomyth, biopedagogy, bioabuse, biocop, and fat personhood and shows how they work together to produce such deep investments in the attainment of the thin, fit body. These concepts, which constitute a theory of the workings of our biocitizenship culture, offer powerful tools for understanding how obesity has come to remake who we are as a nation, and how we might work to reverse course for the next generation.

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Customer Reviews

"Relying on evocative stories and insightful analysis, *Fat-Talk Nation* is a powerful and absorbing expose of the unintended consequences of America's war on fat, making a convincing argument that a war on obesity is not just unwarranted and ineffective, but damaging to people of all sizes." — Linda Bacon, author of *Health at Every Size and Body Respect* "At a time when men, women, and children are taught to hate their bodies, Susan Greenhalgh pushes back against the so-called 'War on Obesity' — I would call her a 'war resister.' She argues convincingly that the 'obesity epidemic' is not about health but about shame and stigma, a national anxiety that traumatizes most people, especially youth. This book promises to become a classic in its field." — Esther D. Rothblum, San Diego State University, coeditor of *The Fat Studies Reader*

"*Fat-Talk Nation* is an extremely rich book: well-written, well-researched, provocative. The set of terms that Susan Greenhalgh introduces — biocitizen, biomyth, fat talk, biopedagogy, bioabuse, bioscopy, and fat subjectivity — are quite useful. I can imagine them becoming central terms in the fields of body studies, health studies, anthropology, women's and gender studies, and, of course, fat studies. The essays by young people are a gold mine, and the fact that Greenhalgh listens closely to these stories makes her work absolutely stand out." — Amy Farrell, Ann and John Curley Chair of Liberal Arts and Professor of American Studies and Women's and Gender Studies, Dickinson College, author of *Fat Shame: Stigma and the Fat Body in American Culture*

"*Fat-Talk Nation* gives us moving first person accounts and insightful analysis into how young people navigate cultural expectations around weight. Through the voices of Susan Greenhalgh's subjects we see that "fat talk" can express itself differently based on ethnicity and socioeconomic class, but its harm is universal. By the end of the book, it becomes painfully clear that the war on fat actually leads our youth to engage in unhealthy behaviors resulting in physical

and/or emotional harm. Greenhalgh's message resonates with the experiences of my own clients; as a therapist specializing in eating and body image problems, I frequently hear how negative weight comments experienced as a child or adolescent contributed to a lifelong struggle with food and weight. I hope this book will be read not only by parents, teachers and coaches, but also by mental health/health professionals who, even if unintentionally, often reinforce the fat shame felt by so many." — Judith Matz, author of *Amanda's Big Dream*

Susan Greenhalgh is Professor of Anthropology at Harvard University. She is the author of *Under the Medical Gaze: Facts and Fictions of Chronic Pain*, *Cultivating Global Citizens: Population in the Rise of China*, and *Just One Child: Science and Policy in Deng's China*. She is coauthor of *Governing China's Population: From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics*.

While I agree with the point the author is trying to make, it is written from an outsider perspective which ends up treating fat people as test subjects rather than human beings.

This is an excellent book for anyone with a body. Whether you approach it as someone with an eating disorder, a fat acceptance activist, or just a normal American who deals with body critiquing every day, this book will speak to you. It's written in a thoughtful, well-organized way in a conversational style that makes it accessible and interesting to anyone. And yet it is also academically rigorous. This book is not about HAES (although it takes about HAES), it is not necessarily coming from a feminist position (although there is a lot here for feminists to like), it is mostly an incredibly perceptive snapshot of how embedded fat talk is into our culture. Greenhalgh does a great job of highlighting how this affects women and men, families and societies. She also sees the social justice connection. This is one of the best and most comprehensive books on the subject out right now.

In *Fat Talk Nation*, Susan effectively uses a less used anthropological tool, auto-ethnographies to bring forth the lived experiences of America's new generation who are the victims of the nation's war on fat. There is no bloodshed nor loss of lives this time..but this is an equally tragic war that is chipping away at the sense of self-identity and confidence of America's young generation. Susan argues that America's new war on both obesity and under-weight has created a scenario where people who deviate from the BMI norms are seen as biologically defective, chronically ill, and even as a threat to others based on 'research evidence' that obesity can be socially contagious. She

identifies a range of actors driving this war including corporate interests, government agencies and scientists who are busy marshaling the resources for an all out war without stopping to examine the underlying reasons (such as high calorie foods, GMO foods, poverty) or its future implications. It is one of those rare anthropological works that makes itself accessible and endearing to readers. Each one of us who shelters even a mild disdain for people who are overweight or underweight need to read this book. It helps us understand the implications of our words and actions right from the individual level all the way up to the national policy making level.

This has got to be one of the most important books I could have read this year, and the main reason is because I get to share it with you. What Susan Greenhalgh has done in *FAT-TALK NATION* is opened the door to a world where the way people see us or we see ourselves is put ahead of health and our own well-being---and how we can begin today to change that and be happier and healthier. I could relate to the struggle of some of those who are profiled in the book, as I have lived in a world and a space where I was told what size would be acceptable for me as a person in the public or where I would "feel better" about myself number-wise when it came to the amount of pounds registered on a scale. Greenhalgh shares that what some see as a help could instead be a dangerous hindrance to others, because they begin to see themselves not as a person but as a number or statistic. Can we all be healthier? Of course we can, but what *FAT-TALK NATION* does is remind us that there is a right and wrong approach, and even though the intentions might be good, we want to make sure we are not doing more harm than good.

Fat-Talk Nation gives us moving first person accounts and insightful analysis into how young people navigate cultural expectations around weight. Through the voices of Susan Greenhalgh's subjects we see that "fat talk" can express itself differently based on ethnicity and socioeconomic class, but its harm is universal. By the end of the book, it becomes painfully clear that the war on fat actually leads our youth to engage in unhealthy behaviors resulting in physical and/or emotional harm. Greenhalgh's message resonates with the experiences of my own clients; as a therapist specializing in eating and body image problems, I frequently hear how negative weight comments experienced as a child or adolescent contributed to a lifelong struggle with food and weight. I hope this book will be read not only by parents, teachers and coaches, but also by mental health/health professionals who, even if unintentionally, often reinforce the fat shame felt by so many.

I reviewed this book for NetGalley. Dr. Greenhaigh's book, "Fat-Talk Nation" reveals the deeply moving personal stories of victims of "America's War on Fat." Her narrative of sometimes traumatic ordeals of people mentioned in the book is disturbing and enlightening. I can understand the plight of these individuals since I have been normal weight most of my life, then unhealthily thin (hyperthyroidism) and at times, rather plump. And I have been treated very differently depending on my weight, despite being the same person! This is an excellent book to begin the much needed discussion on the problems created by the "fat" industry, Big Food, the media and the orthodox medical establishment. Perhaps this book will take us all to the final happy destination of being a healthy, comfortable and happy weight and not worrying about it, and most especially, acceptance of different physically attractive body types (not everyone is tall, thin and blonde) and celebration of different types of beauty. Very well done and timely book!

A very in-depth look at how nobody's body has a monopoly on body hatred. If I could give this book ten stars, I would do so without hesitation.

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