

Transcript: Fat isn't Bad, Anti-Fat Bias Is

Courtney Jones Carney (Co-Host)

Hello and welcome to The Table podcast, where we unpack questions regarding race, ethnicity, culture, norms, and current events. My name is Courtney Jones Carney.

Rosemary Ferreira (Co-Host)

And I'm Rosemary Ferreira. Earlier this year, I had a conversation with my mom over FaceTime. She had stubbed her toe a couple weeks prior, but the pain was still there. She thought it could be broken so she went to go check it out at the doctors. The first thing the doctor talked to her about was her weight. She felt frustrated but not surprised since this wasn't the first time she went to the doctor's office and they didn't address her ailment first or took it seriously. The focus instead was on her weight. I felt like this was such a disservice and not only that, but a form of harm and discrimination, to my mom and her body and I know my mom isn't alone in her experience. If I went to the doctor's as a thinner person, they wouldn't have brought up my weight, they would see the problem for what it was, a stubbed toe. I remember sharing that story with you Courtney and you responded with your own experience as a pregnant person in the OBGYN office.

Courtney Jones Carney

Yeah, let me just start by saying that my OB/GYN, Dr. Dominique Allen, is amazing, alright? But I found myself entering her office as a 40-year-old woman who was pregnant with all of this anxiety that didn't come from her, but instead came from my primary care physician. Who a few years earlier told me that, "Even though all of your blood work indicates that you are healthy, you need to lose weight" and "If you have another baby your OB/GYN will not allow you to gain weight." And immediately when she said, I thought, "Not my OB/GYN, she's awesome. She's not going to ever say, 'Courtney, you can't gain weight while you're pregnant.'" However, four years later, as I'm entering into that office to see my OBY/GYN, I had those feelings rush to me. And really being concerned my entire pregnancy as to whether or not my weight gain was going to be scrutinized because of my weight and my height.

Rosemary Ferreira

That's why we're dedicating this episode to examining anti-fat bias and how it shows up in our society. In an article for Self Magazine, fat activist, Aubrey Gordon, also known by her pen name Your Fat Friend, defined anti-fatness or anti-fat bias as "the attitudes, behaviors, and social systems that specifically marginalize, exclude, underserve, and oppress fat bodies. They refer both to individual bigoted beliefs as well as institutional policies designed to marginalize fat people." At the Intercultural Center, we acknowledge body size as another site of hierarchal

power and oppression in our society. Anti-fatness exists as a form of oppression along with other more commonly discussed -isms such as racism, classism, and ableism. We refrain from using the term fatphobia because as Gordon argued, “Phobias are real mental illnesses, and conflating them with oppressive attitudes and behaviors invites greater misunderstanding of mental illnesses and the people who have them.”

Courtney Jones Carney

Fat activists, such as Gordon, are owning the term “fat” to reclaim power over their bodies while also shining a light onto broader issues of body stigma. While fat activism has gained some visibility in mainstream discourse through the lives of celebrities like Lizzo and on social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok, its roots can be traced back to the fat acceptance movement of the 1960s. In 1967, a group of 500 people came together to stage a “fat-in” in New York City’s Central Park, where they protested against fat discrimination and burned diet books. From this demonstration, organizations were established such as the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance (NAAFA) and the Fat Underground. These groups advocated, and in the case of NAAFA, continue to advocate for fat rights and fat liberation from anti-fat bias and systematic fat oppression in employment, healthcare, and other societal sectors. By stating that fat people deserve respect and dignity, these groups laid the groundwork for what we know today as the body positivity movement.

The body positivity movement grew alongside the rise of social media in the mid-2000s and promotes the idea of accepting and loving all bodies no matter its size or shape. However, some have argued, such as Lizzo, that the body positivity movement has been coopted by smaller, thinner bodies, leaving no space for those at the margins, namely fat, Black, queer people. We’ll unpack these critiques a little later in the episode.

Rosemary Ferreira

These movements for fat liberation and body empowerment are an active response to the broader dominant narrative of fatness as not only a health issue but as a moral problem, with the onus placed on the fat individual. For the past few decades, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (the CDC) has declared that the United States is experiencing an obesity epidemic. Here’s a clip from the CDC from 2011.

Archived Recording (The CDC)

Obesity costs this country about \$150 billion dollars a year, or almost 10% of the national medical budget. Approximately 1 in 3 adults and 1 in 6 children are obese. [Sound of an electronic vital sign monitor beeping] Obesity is an epidemic in the United States and a major cause of death attributable to heart disease, cancer, and diabetes. [Electronic vital sign monitor flatlines.]

Rosemary Ferreira

These sounds for alarm are also often highlighted in local and national news segments across the country. The CDC defines obesity as weight that is higher than what is considered healthy for a given height. Yet, the hyperfocus on obesity results in healthcare providers ignoring or minimizing other health issues, such as my mom with her stubbed toe. That's why activists are calling for a more holistic approach to understanding health. More importantly, scholars and activists argue that we must separate health from anti-fat bias and weight stigma that views fatness as a moral failing on the part of the individual.

Courtney Jones Carney

To help us examine more thoroughly the ways that anti-fatness shows up in our society, we conducted two interviews, one with Tierra Major Kearney, the Prevention and Outreach Program Coordinator at the University of Maryland, Baltimore's Student Counseling Center and Chaia Grubbs, a licensed clinical social worker and senior counselor at the UMB Student Counseling Center. Our second interview was with Ariana Meinster, a final year student at UMB's School of Social Work.

Tierra Major Carney (Guest)

My name is Tierra Major Carney. I use she/her pronouns and I'm the prevention and outreach program coordinator at the UMB Student Counseling Center. I've been here going on three years now. I primarily assist in scheduling and creating preventative mental health programs and workshops for the students at the university. I would say I identify as a Black woman. Those are my 2 identities that I feel I connect with the most. I believe that's how society sees me at face value, uhm, and I'll say that I also identify as a married woman. Uhm, I'm married just a little over a year, but in the short year I've realized that being a married person in society is, it's a pretty big identity and it kind of shows up in different forms of my life.

Chaia Grubbs (Guest)

Hi everyone, I'll go next. I'm Chaia. I am the newest addition in terms of the counseling staff to the Student Counseling Center. I am the senior counselor. I'm a licensed clinical social worker and I also help with the referrals for students who need treatment outside of the Student Counseling center. In terms of my identities, I identify with she/her pronouns. I am a heterosexual woman. I identify as a fat Black Caribbean American woman. I'm a sister, a daughter, an empath, an introvert, I'm single, no children, all the things.

Rosemary Ferreira

Thank you. So as a counselor, as an educator, what are your experiences discussing body size and anti-fatness in your workplace and your personal lives, how does anti fatness and body size discussing body size show up in your lives?

Tierra Major Carney

OK, I can go first, so I'm not a counselor, but I am an educator in just many areas of my life, in my personal life, in my job, uhm. Years before I came to the university, I served in Americorp and under Americorp I was an educator and interestingly, when I was working in that middle school, so many of the Black and Brown girls, I identified with and could see myself in and I could say that was the first time that I started having those conversations about body image with someone other than, you know, just my mom or like my close girlfriends, because now every day I have girls between the ages of you know 10, 13 struggling with their bodies, with how they look, how they feel about them, how their classmates feel about them, things that people would say, and it became a moment for me to take a lot of the honestly, just my own experiences with my own body growing up and what I learned from it, so things such as you know right now as a teenager everybody has hormones that bounce off the wall. It's a whole thing when you're in middle school, but as a young girl for yourself, you have to use this time to kind of educate yourself, educate yourself on what your body is going through, how you feel about your body, you know, talk to who's close to you, parent, guardian, family members. Uhm, and I would say that's the first time I think I sat down with someone who looked like me, younger than myself and I had the question of you know "why do you feel that you're too big for you age?", "why do you feel you know that you're fat?", or "why, when your classmates may say these things it kind of hurts your feelings or it makes you think about certain things or you're comparing yourself to the other girls in your class?" because that's something that I personally went through as well. I can say personally from a young age I was always the bigger girl, any team, any class. I also did sports but nonetheless I was always on the heavier side. It's something I think I did not really understand until I got older, and when I say understand, I mean I didn't really understand how to unpack the feelings that were associated with that.

Chaia Grubbs

I can totally agree with Tierra's experience being a heavier kid. Probably since preschool, if I can remember correctly, I think that that's the first time that you start to recognize that your body type is just a little different from other people. So personally, I would say that that's where I started to really understand that my body was different, that it would show up differently in society and be critiqued differently. I remember being as young as seven years old and being one of the better students in a ballet class and the teacher going up to my mother and saying "Chaia would be a much better dancer if you started making her like shakes in the morning" and so just putting those sort of disordered eating patterns out there into the ether even as young as 6-7 years old, this is what we're doing to children. And professionally I would say I'm much more comfortable professionally talking about, you know anything around body image, disordered eating patterns. Fortunately, and unfortunately, our students are very high achieving and that comes with its pros and cons. Many of these students are coming from institutions that are very where they've been academically, very high achieving, but also may have like D1 sports experience. And so I know I've talked to a lot of my competitive gymnasts. My softball players where they're doing the open weigh ins, writing their weights on a board so everyone can see it. Having their entire team critique their body, saying like OK if you're if

you're a pitcher in softball, they need to. Work on your Arms and so making comments about how flabby someone arms are, and so I'm much more comfortable addressing weight in a professional setting, but I do get the sense that students shy away from. Using very blunt terms like fat, thick, overweight, obese because they see my physical presentation and I think that they want to care to me and protect me. But part of my role is leaving myself out of it and being uncomfortable with what's the truth. Right, if that if me being uncomfortable is going to have a student be able to acknowledge their truth about their body image about how they feel about it and things they like and don't like. Then I have to leave my stuff at the door and allow them to process.

Courtney Jones Carney

Chaia brings up an interesting point on the experiences of students and their relationships with their bodies. To unpack this more, we asked Ariana Meinster about her thoughts as a student.

Ariana Meinster (Guest)

Yeah, uhm, so for me, I'm also just like a super perfectionist which definitely played into part with things and also just like with coping mechanisms, like if I'm super stressed out with school, I often will not eat 'cause that's just what my body is used to doing. So, with trying to be so high achieving and getting good grades and getting prepared to be done with school completely and going into my field Uhm, the stress from that sometimes can really impact my body, so yeah, I could definitely see it like in those spaces how it could impact.

Courtney Jones Carney

The pressures of school can create a stressful environment, which can negatively impact student's relationships with their bodies. Another source of stress can be the bias and discrimination that people face around their bodies.

Courtney Jones Carney

I'm just wondering, we're wondering, how does bias and discrimination show up in regards to body size-How might it show up in education, relationships, media? Or any other you know environments that you'd like to talk about?

Chaia Grubbs

I think it ties really well to ableism because I think that people assume that heavier or fat bodies just cannot do the same physical cardio-based things that other bodies can do. And as we know that is completely untrue. The first thing that I think of is sort of like a whitewashing of the self-care industry. I think that if a person doesn't fit into or onto a standard yoga mat and isn't a size medium or large, you can't go into your Marshalls target and just pick up a quick workout outfit, they're not seen as the standard of beauty as like the body type that can handle cardio and as a person who grew up heavy and who has always been able to stay in shape, who played basketball was able to run the court for an entire 48-minute game, it's not the truth and I think

that we really need to dispel some of those myths because just because a person is heavy doesn't mean that they're not strong or healthy. Why are we so focused on the heavier women, but then there's the women who are starving themselves to stay a certain weight and their babies getting their nutrients, but what about that mom, you know? So why do we focus on the extreme of a larger body, but we rarely critique the smaller bodies, even though the world caters to those smaller bodies.

Tierra Major Carney

I wanted to jump in on the health care topic as well, in that it's really hard when it comes from your doctors, when it comes from your PCP and your surgeon, you know because we go into those appointments, you know in mind that they have my best interests in mind. And it makes me think like recently I underwent my second ACL surgery and I remember when I met with the doctor he, you know, he kind of just looked me up and down, not even looking at my knee, he's a surgeon for many and he's like, "well, you know uhm, it wouldn't hurt as bad if you lost some weight" and that made me think like OK, I can kind of see that, but like, that's not really. What I'm here for? I have a torn ACL I need to undergo surgery again and you're assessing my weight and you're letting me know you know if I focus on my weight, the ACL may not have torn. It won't give, you know. Problems and now we're kind of having a different discussion and also in that moment he looked at my husband who is also overweight, and he's like you. You could lose some weight yourself. And this isn't even his appointment. It we're not even here for. Him, so it's like those little moments where it in you kind of internalize it. And that is what a lot of people are faced with in society. You're just going to your doctor. You're going, you know, to just do something regular. Get assessed with surgery. Choose a date and next thing you know it's like now I'm feeling insulted and my husband's really insulted and that is like just kind of to me the complete picture of how something so simple can almost allow society to turn against heavier people.

Rosemary Ferreira

Tierra's story is unfortunately not an isolated incident. Activists and scholars are using the term weight bias to describe negative assumptions or beliefs about a person's body based on a person's weight and appearance. These harmful beliefs include the idea that heavier people are usually unhealthy and that if people with excess weight really "cared" about their health they would try to lose weight. These beliefs assume that one's weight is easy to change, and the blame or failure is placed on the individual if they do not lose weight.

These beliefs can result in substandard and harmful practices in healthcare. Studies show that healthcare providers provide less time positively communicating and providing information to heavier patients. Physicians may also hyper-attribute symptoms and problems to obesity, rather than refer patients for diagnostic testing or offer treatment options that aren't only to lose weight.

Rebecca Puhl, the deputy director of the Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity at the University of Connecticut, argues that “We need more content...on obesity and nutrition so health care providers understand just how complex body weight is. It’s not just an issue of calories in and calories out. Not only is obesity and nutrition not getting enough attention, but weight stigma is completely off the radar.” Puhl and others argue that medical schools must dedicate more time and attention to understanding weight gain, not simply as a laziness or lack of control on the part of the individual, but as a result of complex factors such as genetics, the environment, and psychology.

Dedicating time to unpack weight bias in medical training can vastly improve the experiences of heavier patients. Research demonstrates that weight bias and discrimination can lead to distrust in health care services and consequently, can lead to patient’s unwillingness to seek care. Research also shows that weight bias impacts people’s mental and physical health, resulting in higher rates of depression, anxiety, substance abuse, suicidal tendency, high blood pressure and blood sugar. Abnormal eating behaviors are another consequence of weight bias. In our interview with Ariana, she talks about her experience with eating disorders.

Ariana Meinster

Yeah, uhm, so in my personal life I am in recovery for, I've been in it for six years, for other specified feeding. And eating disorders it's abnormal eating patterns, uhm, usually. So, the three that we tend to think of the most is anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge eating disorder. But there are also like sort of like uhm, if you don't meet the criteria for the other ones, there's like other specified feeding and eating disorders or unspecified feeding and eating disorders. Uh which I fall into the other so basically uhm, how mine would have been is if you take anorexia and you take bulimia you take away the bingeing of bulimia, that would be me. But there isn't a disorder for that necessarily, so they have these other categories for a catch all if you don't fit the like most well-known ones. Uhm, so it's been a big part of my life uhm, and with that I've experienced a lot of like fat phobia because I don't fit, I guess, society's viewpoint of an eating disorder. Society tends to view it as like super super skinny when in reality most people who have eating disorders don't look that way and also just eating disorders can come in all body sizes. It impacts any body, so I've sort of had to advocate for myself with that. Uhm, having doctors misdiagnosed me constantly because of how I look, like I've had doctors tell me I have binge eating disorder when I specifically tell them I'm not eating, so they completely ignore, Uhm, what I'm telling them just based on their own preconceptions of how I look and it didn't really get better until I actually went to a therapist who specializes in eating disorders and got my official diagnosis from them and then that's when doctors started to take me more seriously. So, it wasn't my own voice is because I got the assistance from a professional, then they started taking me. Uhm, so that's just it became a big passion of mine to try to work to, like dismantle some of the stigma surrounding eating disorders, especially for people who are plus size. So, I do, like in my classes whenever we have opportunity to do research, I tend to do

research on that topic or just on eating disorders in general, just so I can better inform myself on things, but also when I'm having conversations with people I can inform them also, so yeah.

Rosemary Ferreira

Thank you so much for sharing and on that point, then what would you want listeners to this podcast to know about eating disorders?

Ariana Meinster

I was just going to say like to recognize that they come in every size, like there's no right look for an eating disorder. Uhm, like you could be walking down the street. You would never know necessarily that someone has an eating disorder. So just keeping that in mind, especially if you're going into the medical field, just so you're trying to work to get rid of that bias because the medical field is sort of notorious for that. So just if you're planning on going into this field to sort of know, hey, it can impact anyone like even just like regardless of gender, it can impact any gender. Also, that's another thing that people tend to think that eating disorders are like a quote, unquote "woman disease". But it impacts everyone. So there there's a lot of like misconceptions that people need to work through and not have those biases when working with this population.

Rosemary Ferreira

When we examine the origins of anti-fat bias and weight stigma, we can trace its roots to anti-Blackness and other systems of oppression. Sabrina Strings, associate professor of sociology at the University of California, Irvine and author of the book *Fearing the Black Body: The Racial Origins of Fatphobia* provides a history of the shift in Western conceptualizations of fat bodies as attractive and beautiful to inferior and excessive. Strings argues that this shift in how fat bodies were viewed was developed to create distinctions between white and Black bodies and justify white supremacist and anti-Black beliefs. This shift takes place during the enlightenment era in Western Europe, which occurred during the peak of the transatlantic slave trade. During this era, thin, slender bodies became a symbol of rationality, intelligence, and self-control, while fat, particularly on Black bodies, was evidence of Black people's "savagery," laziness, and racial inferiority.

Western colonialist ideologies of the body also shaped the ways we now view assigned sex and gender identity. In her interview, Ariana shared her thoughts on gender and body size, particularly how society's focus on body issues as a "woman's problem" excludes the experiences of transgender individuals, masculine folks, and cisgender men.

Ariana Meinster

Yeah, uhm, so just first to put it out there, I'm a cisgender woman so I just want to put that out there when I'm speaking on this, uhm, so a lot of my experience with this either comes from like my friends who are transgender or research that I've done and research actually shows that

like transgender individuals actually are at a higher risk of eating disorders because also, like the gender dysmorphia and gender dysphoria issues, uhm, so that can actually put them in an increased risk for body dysmorphia. Just in general, uhm, because of like the thoughts that they're having, so it's important to put research and resources into that topic as well, since they are at a higher risk. Society right now is not giving them those resources it seems like so prioritizing that and also just ciswomen in general like they're not getting resources 'cause it has been such a woman focused talk, which, like as a woman I appreciate it, but also I see like other identities need this support as well. So, I think we should really work to if we're seeing a lacking somewhere and the research is showing that like we need to start working towards this, that we really need to start on that because people shouldn't have to wait until things are so bad to have the resources, they should get the support when they're feel like first, they're ready for the support. That's another thing with eating disorders, sometimes people push the person with the eating disorder to get treatment when they're not ready, so that's an important concept, but also just when people realize they need the support and they want the support, they should have the support regardless of their identity like we shouldn't just be focusing on ciswomen for that.

Rosemary Ferreira

When thinking about the intersectionality of race, gender, and body size, we hear about the harm and violence imposed on the bodies of larger Black women in the stories shared by Chaia and Tierra.

Chaia Grubbs

OK, so. Well, one of the biggest insults personally that I have ever heard in my life and it's supposed to cut as an insult. Uhm, is you're a fat bitch OK, like and literally within the past six months I feel like just driving. I don't know if you guys have noticed that driving has just been a lot more hectic, post-pandemic. People are a lot nastier behind the wheel, and so I feel like I've been in the last six months. I can distinctly remember at least three times being called a fat bitch behind the wheel, right? And it's supposed to cut really deep, like your intention is to is to point out something that you think that I'm unaware of. And it takes me back to the health care system as well. So most people who are overweight, they loaded their overweight then going to the doctor. They already have this like certain level of anxiety because they know that they are going to have. To get weighed. Right? So even just being trauma informed and thinking about that, like if I have a black woman coming into my. Office or a woman of color. She has probably been met with so many other microaggressions before she got to this point, even if it is 8:00 o'clock in the morning. Right? Why not just think. Just be gentle. Like just don't ask questions that are just ignorant. I've been to two physicians who have said, you know, if like that very ancient scale, which for myself is very triggering the one with the tick Marks and if mine at some point or another. Couldn't be registered on that, then it was kind of like. Well, how much do you weigh? And it's like. Well, that's not helpful whether I'm overweight or not, that's not helpful to the conversation, nor does it help me feel safe to disclose my symptoms, and so I

think that just being more inclusive in airlines, in restaurants, movie theaters, I mean all of these physical locations where your size. Can be such so much more heightened than it needs to be when the anxiety around your size is already there, even just like amusement parks. I know for safety there's like weight limits. Personally, I'm not a roller coaster person anymore 'cause I've seen all those like horror stories, but I just wish we lived in a more inclusive society and like fashion isn't enough.

Tierra Major Carney

I could say uhm, kind of piggybacking off what Chaia said is it shows up first. Uhm, like Chaia said, you're just driving someone angry at you. They're gonna call you a fat, you know. So and so because I guess that's all they see and similar to when I'm going to the doctor, I'm showing you my hurt knee or my heart to but for some reason the first thing you can see about me is my weight. And that's not fair, because we're so much more than that. So, like in the first question you asked, you know, what are my identities? And I say I'm a black woman 'cause I feel like that's what people see me as, but I guess if I was looking at myself from the outside, I would be a black, heavyset woman because that is what some people would see. 1st, when they saw me, uh, a similar situation is I took a flight and I. I think I was having trouble with my seat belt. Just I don't know if it was stuck under my leg or just something silly and the flight attendant comes over. He leans in really close and my this is like, you know, a little bit during COVID, so you shouldn't be getting that close. Super bored. I'm kind of backing up and he pulls his mask down a little bit and he's like. Do you need an extension for your belt? I'm like excuse me, you know? I mean I'm fine. You know I was just fine and he's like, well, you know, I could tell that yeah, I'm like you could tell what that I was just putting on my belt like everybody else you know and I feel like even in that moment I might have even gotten more offended than he in. Then he intended, right? He probably was just trying to be. Helpful, but because it happens all the time where people just randomly come, oh Do you need a extra? Room or do you want me? To give you a double seat and it hurts. You know, especially because you wanna just be seen as everyone else. You wanna just be treated as everyone else. But it shows up first in. Society often, and I feel like there is a certain. Treatment towards heavier people because it it's what. People see first. For you.

Courtney Jones Carney

And so you know when you're thinking about this in healthcare and we've talked about like the ways that we have. Been addressed by doctors. What sort of statements doctors have made, and particularly when you're going into surgery, a situation where you might be under anesthesia. Or maybe you already have other things playing in the back of your mind about black maternal death rates being higher than other folks. Or thinking about how people may be. Less interested in really acknowledging the pain of people who identify as. Black for me that doesn't put me in a situation where I feel comfortable under the care of this particular doctor, so if my OB GYN were telling me that I'm too heavy, I'm so heavy, I need to really concentrate on my weight when I go in and in March to have my cesarean, I probably wouldn't feel very

comfortable with her and whether she values me as a human being and is gonna ensure that I'm gonna make it out safely like I'm not gonna feel comfortable in that situation. And so you know, constantly thinking about the ways like do people see me as a whole person and do they think that my life is worthy of continuing, especially when they're about to. Operate like that's heavy. That's a lot to have to consider when you're going in to talk to a surgeon about your upcoming surgery that's taking place.

Chaia Grubbs

I think Courtney you bring up such a good point and it's something it took me back to a recent suicide training that I did, and it sucks to even say that you know, we need training on that, but it's part of our world now unfortunately and we're seeing it more and more severely since the pandemic happened. But I think with part of suicide they say that there is a level of hopelessness and fearlessness that combines to make people be successful with it. And I think about that even as you mentioned, going under anesthesia comfortably as a heavier person, like you may have some of those fears that are just innately in there, like not only about your size but like am I gonna have a reaction to anesthesia, am I gonna recover fine, are my wounds gonna heal because I'm larger or because I'm diabetic or whatever. But the size is what's focused on, so it's always like "make sure you try to like eat healthy and workout before you get your surgery so that your recovery is good". Everything is around size when really? What if it's that I need an extra couple sessions with my therapist the week of surgery because I'm very anxious or what if I need to take a trip before and after to really allow myself to heal in an uninterrupted fashion like I think that we need to move away from just making everything medical and really looking at the person holistically.

Rosemary Ferreira

Courtney and Chaia's points on being seen not just for their weight, but for their humanity, particularly in healthcare, is in alignment with what many fat activists are fighting for. Body positivity has taken a hold as the current mainstream framework used to advocate for the acceptance of all body sizes. However, fat activists are also pushing back against what they argue is the cooptation of an original movement that centered body justice, not only for fat people, but for other bodies pushed to the margins of society, such as trans+ people, people with disabilities, BIPOC folks. In 2017, Aubery Gordon wrote

"Body positivity has widened the circle of acceptable bodies, yes, but it still leaves so many of us by the wayside. It's rallying cry, love your body, presumes that our greatest challenges are internal, a poisoned kind of thought about our own bodies. It cannot adapt to those of us who love our bodies, but whose bodies are rejected by those around us, used as grounds for ejecting us from employment, health care, and more."

Body justice, therefore, isn't solely the internal journey of loving one's body, it's also dismantling institutionalized forms of oppression targeted towards fat people, people with disabilities, trans+ people, and BIPOC folks.

Another area that we discussed in our interview with Tierra and Chaia was the role of the media, particularly television, on creating stereotypes and stigmatizing fat people.

Rosemary Ferreira

So, with this association of fatness with negativity you know we see these TV shows like growing up like The Biggest Loser was always like that was a TV show me and my mom would watch together. Like you're cheering these folks on to lose weight, right? There's this like societal I guess approval of losing weight, right, that there's this "you're doing a good thing if you are losing weight". And so, I wanted to hear your thoughts around these reality TV shows that are focused specifically on losing weight.

Chaia Grubbs

I mean I think the fact that like a show like The Biggest Loser or I'm laughing 'cause it's one of my personal favorites and the doctor is just, he's rude but in the best way. I'm like, Oh My 600 Pound Life Dr. Nowzaradan. Like when he's like you could have lost 30 pounds by now you know like yes however like The Biggest Loser, for example, they're doing that with in a controlled environment. They are not allowed to like really leave. If they are, they're sent out with like meal prep food and they're making sure that the coaches are checking in with them. They're working them to the bone like way harder than any of us would ever work out with a full time job. And so, it's not realistic to sustain that once you get home, you can't work out for you know, do two workouts a day, take care of your children, cook, do grad school homework, and still be a human being, and give to yourself and your partner if you sustain that level of intensity. And I mean it, it really is not healthy for your body. Uhm, but also, I think about how much there's like this salaciousness around showing the trauma of fatness, right? Like My 600 Pound Life they don't really end up being on the show until they're like at the point where they almost need to be cut out of their homes, it's like "let me show how destitute in the worst-case scenario of a fat person to show you that you need to lose weight", when in reality a lot of those people it's trauma, right? So, they need to unpack what's going on up here rather than controlling the food intake and it's gonna that's gonna get me on a whole other conversation around my thoughts on the vertical sleeve gastrectomy and like other forms of weight loss surgery. I absolutely think that it is, it's a legitimate tool for some people, but I think some people and a lot of people in our society use it as like a quick fix and it's not that, it's a tool, but you still gotta deal with all of the symptoms. Like I can have depression and even if I'm taking an antidepressant, I still have to work out, I still have to go to therapy, and I still have to maintain a routine of pleasurable activities. It's the same with the weight loss surgery, you have to change everything as your body is changing or you're just going to get flooded with trauma and gain it all back, which is what a lot of these people do.

Tierra Major Carney

I read an article that delves into, uhm, anti-fatness and fat phobia and describing how fat phobia is, it's not a phobia, it's not a thing, you know because phobias are mental illnesses that

people suffer from, and society does not have a fear of fat. They have a disgust with it. They have a hatred towards people that are heavier, and I think these shows just further showcase that our society is in disgust if you're heavier. Going back to My 600 Pound Life, right? Those people they're often at the worst state when they find them and that is intentional, that is to show, like you know, it's almost abuse honestly, when I'm watching that show, that's what it looks like. It's abuse to these people by, you know, just taking them at their worst state and showing them be, you know, cut from their house or having a crane lift them up and take them out and if as a society we really cared about these people and wanted them to get healthier, why would we need to put it on TV? You know, why would we need to have a camera crew up there when they're cutting the wall open? That's not helping the person, that's damaging, it's damaging to their spirit.

Courtney Jones Carney

It's fall, we are moving into winter. For some folks they may be celebrating some holidays where there's food associated with it. Some folks, like may go into a New Year's resolution sort of season, and quite often when folks are entering to into that, it's about getting this new body and losing weight and working out consistently and so Uhm, when it's we wanted to know if you could share what would you like to share with folks who are receiving messages about their bodies specifically around this time of year, where there could be for some folks, depending on what sort of holidays they practice, there might be events where there are large amounts of food, but then at the end of that, then there might be this pressure then to make this commitment to totally change and not engage in large amounts of food. So, what would you like to share with folks who are trying to balance some of those some of those messages that they receive about their bodies while they're navigating this particular season?

Chaia Grubbs

I definitely think that it's important to remember that first the food is not going anywhere and like, yes, we cook most of these foods like this one or two particular days of the year but if you really want that food like, you can absolutely get it another time so you don't have to eat like the food is going out of style, which I feel like is what a lot of people end up doing and taking excessive amounts of doggy bags, but also this is the time of the year that even for myself, you know, I've lost probably over two years, probably lost about somewhere between 50 and 60 pounds and for me it has always been about maintenance and you see how quickly I ran through that number because to me it's always about how much farther I have to go, right? Like I've lost this very awesome amount of weight, but I always look at OK, but I need to get to this thing and for me I don't even know what that thing is or what that place is, but I think that it is about remembering that success can look different. What if maintenance is success through the holidays? Like what if you just don't gain any weight, which is a huge win because we know that this is the time where everything has the heavy creams, the baked goods, everything is gonna feel warm and cozy in your body and it's gonna taste good in the moment but for me and again speaking to myself, I know that with my like health issues, just PCOS, for example, all those

foods are gonna make me feel really inflamed and gross the next day, right? And so also thinking about this food as like fuel. How is it going to make you feel but really not putting pressure on yourself like we have all had an exceptionally difficult last two years and I think that we would be remiss if we were trying to force ourselves into these boxes and really, I think a lot of people to be honest, are just gonna go ham this year, no pun intended, because we just haven't been able to do so yeah.

Tierra Major Carney

So, I would say uhm, be comfortable, do what you have to do what's comfortable for you. If you've been looking forward to the holidays, you know let's say you've been really working hard and eating your greens and doing your walks and drinking your water, you know, you've been looking forward to grandma's pies, mom greens eat. That's why, that's what it's there for and, the reason I'm saying that is because I know for a lot of heavier people, there's guilt that comes with it. The guilt around allowing ourselves to enjoy those foods. I can say me personally, I mean, now that I'm older not so much, but when I was younger, my grandmother would watch what I put on my plate. Sometimes she would just take the plate, so "I'll make it for you, you don't know what you doing, you know you gonna put too much", you know, and now that I'm older, it's like, well, grandma, you don't know I've been waiting all year for this, I'm about to go ham and that's what I do 'cause that's what I wanna do. I'm grown and I came here to eat, you know, and I'm comfortable with it and I know that even if tomorrow I feel sluggish, I prepared myself for that and I went in knowing that that's what I wanted to do. And then you have the other side to it where if you know that you're gonna feel guilty, you know that you've been working hard and you're gonna try to hit the workout on your Friday then you just you can't go as hard. You have to do what's comfortable for you and you have to be realistic for your lifestyle and I think being realistic for your lifestyle is kind of what keeps you on track and honestly blocking out what everyone else is saying. If they're watching your plate, what they're doing, what they're eating, you know people makes you know quick comments, "Oh, that's your second plate?" Yeah, it is. Yep, would you like me to make you a second one? That's it, you know I mean, I have to do what's comfortable for me, and that is usually how I can remove like the extra emotions that come with holiday eating is I remember what I'm here for. I enjoy my family. I enjoy my time. I enjoy my comfort food and then I pick back up on Monday, trying to do better.

Chaia Grubbs

And one last thing I want to point out is that emotionally and in terms of food triggers, the holidays can be very triggering for a lot of people, and so also figuring out what your you know, food safety plan, or emotional safety plan needs to be to keep yourself sane through the holidays. So, if it's food, do you need to sit farther away from the serving area of the home? I know like, you know, in my home a lot of the kids will go to the basement downstairs area to eat and watch the little TV or whatever with their game Teams. Whereas, like the adults, will stay upstairs nearer to the food. So, are you a person who needs to go into that

room with the children so that you're away from the food? Also, just emotionally, is there a way that that you can eat beforehand so that you're not stuffing yourself emotionally because you're stressed at that person's house? So similar to what Tierra said, just it's not always a size fits all when it comes to the holidays.

Rosemary Ferreira

Yeah, so it sounds like you know this inner dialogue that we have towards ourselves is really important, right? Being self aware, being aware of how we're showing up. And I think. With that being said, you know, like remembering that the messages that we're receiving is from a society that centers anti fatness, right? That this is... this is a form of oppression, just like racism? Just like sexism, just as classism, right, and so that voice that we might be hearing in the back of my of our minds that says, you know, like don't eat that second plate, even though you really want to is, is that voice of oppression? Is those societal messages? And remembering Like who we are, right? Like who am I in this space? Do I want this second plate? Yes, so I'm gonna take the second plate 'cause this food is banging.

Rosemary Ferreira

The fight for social justice and equity often has a simple premise, that human beings regardless of their social identities deserve to be treated with dignity and have access to resources, such as safe and quality housing, education, and healthcare. Fat people are demanding to live in a world where their humanity is acknowledged and cared for. We must continue to push ourselves to critically examine the ways we've been socialized to internalize anti-fat beliefs and actively practice interrupting anti-fat prejudice and discrimination in our personal and professional lives.

Courtney Jones Carney

Whether you're celebrating holidays this winter or not, we wish you a safe and healthy winter. We'll be taking a bit of a hiatus in January but don't fret! We will be coming back to release new episodes in February.

Angela Jackson (Producer, End Credits)

The Table is a production of the Intercultural Center in the Division of Student Affairs at the University of Maryland Baltimore. It's hosted and produced by Courtney Jones Carney and Rosemary Ferreira. This episode was also written by Rosemary. The show's executive producer and editor is me, Angela Jackson, senior marketing specialist in the Division of Student Affairs. A big thank you to our guests, Tierra Major Carney, Chaia Grubbs, and Ariana Meinster, for joining us at the table. For more information about the Intercultural Center, including events where students can learn more about race, ethnicity, culture, norms, and current events, visit umaryland.edu/ile. See you in February.

As a reminder we want to hear from you, the listeners. So, send us your questions regarding race, ethnicity, culture, norms, and current events, and Courtney and Rosemary, and maybe one of our guests, will answer them on the show. Email us at ile@umaryland.edu. If you'd like to be anonymous, just let us know in the body of the email.