

Stigma obesity



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Laura Mealer 4/11/12 Essay #9 Stigma: Obesity The fat stigma is becoming a global problem according to an article in the New York Times by Tara Parker-Pope. " Dr. Brewis and her colleagues recently completed a multicountry study intended to give a snapshot of the international zeitgeist about weight and body image,"(NY times). ' The findings were troubling, suggesting that negative perceptions about people who are overweight may soon become the cultural norm in some countries, including places where plumper, larger bodies traditionally have been viewed as attractive,' according to a new report in the journal Current Anthropology.

Dr. Lear, who is studying rising childhood obesity in that country and in Canada, agrees the potential for stigmatization exists. "We know in developed countries that obese people are less successful, less likely to get married, less likely to get promoted," he said. The researchers elicited answers of true or false to statements with varying degrees of fat stigmatization. The fat-stigma test included statements like, "People are overweight because they are lazy" and "Some people are fated to be obese,"(NY Times).

Using mostly in-person interviews, supplemented with questions posed over the Internet, they tested attitudes among 700 people in 10 countries, territories and cities, including American Samoa, Tanzania, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Paraguay, Argentina, New Zealand, Iceland, two sites in Arizona and London. Dr. Brewis said she fully expected high levels of fat stigma to show up in the "Anglosphere" countries, including the United States, England and New Zealand, as well as in body-conscious Argentina. But what she did not

expect was how strongly people in the rest of the testing sites expressed negative attitudes about weight.

The results, Dr. Brewis said, suggest a surprisingly rapid "globalization of fat stigma." But what appears to have changed is the level of criticism and blame leveled at people who are overweight. One reason may be that public health campaigns branding obesity as a disease are sometimes perceived as being critical of individuals rather than the environmental and social factors that lead to weight gain. "A public health focus on 'You can change,' or 'This is your fault,' can be very counterproductive," he said. "Stigma is serious." "Key ideas in the global model of obesity include the notions that obesity is a disease and that fat reflects personal and social failing. In all our samples, some fat stigma is evident, and the global model suggests that the cultural shared idea that fat or obesity is a basis for judging the social and personal qualities of the individual. However, and critically, the shared cultural model also suggests the culturally correct perspective that expressing those judgments too obviously or forcefully is not acceptable. (JSTOR) " In summary, these analyses suggest that norms about fat-as-bad and fat-as-unhealthy are spreading globally and that cultural diversity in conceptions of ideal or acceptable body size appears to be on the decline. Certainly, negative and especially discrediting ideas about fat/obesity are now seemingly much more widespread than a thorough reading of the available ethnographies would suggest. This process of cultural change appears to be happening very quickly, likely representing homogenization in beliefs in this domain just within the last decade or two.

This leans us toward the age-old anthropological challenge of better understanding what drives the cultural diffusion of new ideas and feeds their gaining salience. Our findings hint that newer forms of educational media, including global public health campaigns, may be driving this trend. Whatever their source, it is important to understand the dynamics of fat-stigmatizing cultural models because of their potential influence on both physical and social well-being of individuals in a wide range of socioecological contexts. "(JSTOR)