The Otherness of Fat:
Intersectional Enactments and the Neoliberal “War” on Obesity

Guest Presenters
Hilary Offman, M.D. & Zoë Meleo-Erwin, Ph.D.

Saturday, October 5, 2019
9:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.
Trinity College, University of Toronto
Combination Room, 6 Hoskin Avenue, Toronto

ABOUT THE PRESENTATION

The last few decades of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st centuries have been characterized by a dramatic rise in body weight that has come to be labelled an “obesity epidemic”. During this same period of time, size acceptance or “fat activism” has gained traction. Fat activism asserts that size diversity is a normal variation of being human, challenges the notion that there is a straight-forward relationship between weight and health, and asserts that purposeful weight loss attempts are both inefficacious and harmful.

Intersectionality refers to the insight that the organization of power is better understood as being shaped, not by a single axis of social division, but by many axes that work together and influence each other. Body size intersects significantly with gender, since fat women are subject to specific forms of bias and discrimination not experienced by (those perceived as) fat men.

PART ONE: Hilary Offman, M.D.
The Otherness of Fat: An Intersectional Enactment of Epic Proportions

Part one of the conference examines the intersectional impact that pervasive anti-fat stigma can have on the clinical encounter, especially when fat therapists and patients perform weight loss differently. It is argued that if intersectional axes of difference can co-produce diminished social status within an individual, they can also multiply interactively across individuals who share that same marginalized status, then qualifying as intersectional enactments. Detailed clinical material will be provided.

PART TWO: Zoë Meleo-Erwin PhD
Body Autonomy and the Seductive Power of Normal: Where Weight Loss Surgery and Fat Activism Meet

Part two of the conference traces the increasing rates of bariatric surgery, weight-based stigma and discrimination, and fat activism over the past several decades. It is argued that the concurrent rise in these phenomena must be understood within the context of “neoliberal healthism”, the notion that individuals are fundamentally responsible for their own life choices and outcomes, including those related to health. The “failure” to lose weight is thus seen as indicating not only a weak moral character but also poor citizenship. The presenter explores the case of individuals who uphold fat-activist ideals who later decide to pursue bariatric surgery. It is argued that, though tricky, the choice to lose weight by means of a surgical procedure is not necessarily incommensurate with claiming progressive fat politics.
**Learning Objectives**

After participating in this program, participants should be able to:

1. Discuss the nature of the “obesity epidemic” and the role “fat activism” has played in countering the “war” on individuals medically classified as obese.
2. Describe the concept of “neoliberal healthism” and how it contributes to both fat stigma and the depiction of fat as indicative of failure.
3. Describe the concept of intersectionality and how it applies to fat body size.
4. Identify elements of shared intersectionality and to apply the concept of intersectional enactments to facilitate a deeper understanding of the impact of relative power and privilege on the clinical encounter.

**Schedule of the Day**

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<td>Registration</td>
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<td>9:15—10:30</td>
<td>Presentation – Hilary Offman, M.D.</td>
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<td>Presentation – Zoë Meleo-Erwin, Ph.D.</td>
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**About the Speakers**

**Hilary Offman MD FRCPC** is a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst with a private practice in Toronto, Canada with hospital appointments at the University Health Network and St. Michael’s Hospital at the University of Toronto. She is a graduate, faculty member and supervisor of the Toronto Institute for Contemporary Psychoanalysis and a lecturer and supervisor in the Department of Psychiatry, University of Toronto. As well, she is former co-chair of the Candidates Committee for the International Association of Relational Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis (IARPP) and is a current member of the IARRP Board of Directors.

**Zoë Meleo-Erwin, MA, PhD** is an Assistant Professor of Public Health at William Paterson University in New Jersey, United States. She received her doctorate in sociology from the Graduate Center of the City University of New York in 2013 and holds master’s degrees in social ecology from Goddard College, and disability studies from the City University of New York School of Professional Studies. Her research interests include health disparities, structural determinants of health, weight-based stigma, food-based health movements, and decision making around vaccination. A list of her publications can be found at www.zoemeleoerwin.com

**Registration Options**

**REGULAR:** $90  **STUDENT:** $40

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