What's New?

The University is seeking nominations for individuals interested in serving on several committees informing the new WMU Strategic Plan. To learn more:

https://wmich.edu/strategic/planning-nomination?
utm_medium=Email&utm_source=ExactTarget&utm_campaign=marcom

The WMU Racial Justice Advisory Committee (RJAC) hosted a townhall is September. To learn more about RJAC and view the townhall recording: https://wmich.edu/president/rjac

The WMU Diversity Steering Council is currently reviewing and drafting common definitions to support consistency with diversity, equity, and inclusion on campus. More to come.

CEHD IDC Staff Submission: Weight Discrimination in the Workplace by Nicole Lockwood-Womack

The CEHD IDC thanks Nicole Lockwood-Womack for submitting this piece about weight discrimination in the workplace, a topic that is not always included in conversations about diversity, equity, and inclusion. Due to formatting issues, only text and links appear below, we encourage you to review the article with graphics by visiting the CEHD IDC Shared Teams folder:

https://teams.microsoft.com/l/channel/19%3aSZD4gFDCoO8LEct8XSjIwY8bNxBXXkuWEIEPmt1wSA1%40thread.tacv2/General?groupId=8e0e48f9-b8fc-4abc-a3f4-a9231846e77d&tenantId=25762251-7aa9-4c72-905f-39bf026a8a84

Key Facts:

- Weight discrimination is common in the workplace.
- Weight discrimination intersects with other forms of discrimination and compounds its impact.
- Many strategies can be implemented to build a weight-inclusive environment.
You recently receive an email from the Human Resources (HR) Department at work regarding your health insurance. You notice that you will be paying more for your health insurance because you are now classified in the “obese” range on the Body Mass Index (BMI) scale. But, you feel like this does not make sense. You work-out on a regular basis and try to eat nutritionally supportive foods, yet some of your thinner counterparts (likely falling into the “healthy” range on the BMI scale) eat candy all day and never work out; they also won’t be charged more for insurance. You feel very frustrated and confused.

While this is not an actual situation, these types of weight-based discriminatory and stigmatizing acts happen on a regular basis in the workforce. Additionally, there is little evidence that these types of penalties contribute to better health outcomes or lower healthcare costs (Obesity Action Coalition, 2015, p.3). Furthermore, as the National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA) points out, “Since the rise of national obesity prevention campaigns, the incidence of weight stigma has increased about 66%. The research is clear: overemphasizing weight can encourage disordered eating and have counterproductive effects” (2019).

What exactly is weight stigma? And how can we transition to a more inclusive environment in the workplace?

**What is Weight Stigma?**

Weight stigma refers to the **discriminatory acts** and beliefs towards people **because of their weight and size** (example: the health insurance example above). Weight stigma takes place in many settings including the following (World Health Organization [WHO], 2017; World Obesity Federation, 2018):

- The workplace
- Educational Settings
- Personal Relationships
- The Media
- Healthcare

**Weight Stigma in the Workplace.**

It is quite common (54% of adults) for people in large bodies to experience weight discrimination in the workplace (WHO, 2017). Compared to thinner counterparts, people in large bodies can experience the following (UCONN Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity, p. 2, n.d.; OAC, pp.1-4, 2015):

- Less employment opportunities (with same qualifications)
- Lower wages (3-6% less)
- More strict discipline
- Wrongful termination
- Negative stereotypes (e.g., lazy, less competent, etc.).

**Daily Interactions that Encourage Weight Stigma in the Workplace:**

It is usually quite acceptable for people in the workplace to make the following comments regarding weight (or other body-based comments). Often times, these comments are prefaced with very little thought to how it might impact the individual it is directed to or the people around them.

- **Commenting about weight, appearance, or ability** (e.g., “Wow, you look great since you’ve lost weight,” “I’m so undisciplined, I just cannot lose this weight,” “Oh you can eat whatever you want, you’re thin,” “I’m not sure they are strong enough to do that,” etc.). Mostly these are
coming from a place of good intention; however, we should always try to elevate impact over intention. Try incorporating more non-appearance compliments!

- **Food-related comments.** When people discuss dieting or calories, push food onto others, or make other uncomfortable food-related comments, this can impact people who have (or currently have) issues with eating disorders or disordered eating (NEDA, 2018). While everyone is allowed to do what is best for their body (dieting, calorie counting, non-dieting, etc.), and should be responsible for their own reactions, we should also be aware of how our actions may impact others. Consider asking for consent before you discuss dieting or make body-based comments.

**What is Weight Inclusivity?**
The basis of weight inclusivity is acceptance and inclusion of all people in all bodies. It is understanding and behaving in a way where people in all different types of bodies have value (regardless of "health" status). The Association for Size Diversity and Health (ASDAH) states that they envision the following "a world that celebrates bodies of all shapes and sizes, in which body weight is no longer a source of discrimination and where oppressed communities have equal access to the resources and practices that support health and well being" (2020).

**Why is this Important?**
As one would imagine, individuals who are discriminated against because of their body size miss out on opportunities in the workplace (and many other places). Additionally, very often, these missed opportunities are the exact things that support health (jobs, financial stability, health insurance, relationships, etc.) (Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, n.d.). Additionally, it is important to note the complexity of weight discrimination and how it can intersect (intersectionality is a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw) with other forms of discrimination compounding its impact on equitable access to resources and the power one holds (Reece, 2018). If we want a healthy and equitable workforce and society, it is important to focus on creating spaces that are all-inclusive.

**Shifting to a Weight Inclusive Mindset**
For many people, weight inclusivity goes against everything they believe and have been taught to be true about health. It can be hard to shift to this place. However, there are some simple things one can do to start the process. Focusing on the following is a great place to start (Tylka et al., 2014)!

- **Follow people on social media who represent large bodies (and all bodies) in a neutral or positive way.** Often times, people in large bodies are mocked or only represented in ways that show them focused on shrinking. Some favorites include:
  - Diversify the Outdoors
  - Meg Boggs
  - Any Neal
  - Morit Summers
  - Mirna Valerio
- **Listen to people in larger bodies.** Start with Sonya Renee Taylor and the podcast Maintenance Phase by Audrey Gordon & Michael Hobbes.
- **Be intentional about body-based language.** For example, If you notice yourself using the term "I feel fat," try to identify what you are actually feeling (fat is not a feeling). It is also stigmatizing to people in large bodies.

**What Can Employers do to Promote Weight Inclusivity?**
There are several strategies that employers can take to create weight inclusive environments (Obesity Action Coalition, 2015; Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, n.d.;
What Can Employers do to Promote Weight Inclusivity?

There are several strategies that employers can take to create weight inclusive environments (Obesity Action Coalition, 2015; Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, n.d.; UCONN Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity, p. 3, n.d).

- Implement programs that focus on healthy behaviors for all people.
- Encourage work-life balance (allowing more time for healthy behaviors)
- Create inclusive work environments.
  - Provide inclusive seating options
  - Include weight stigma in diversity and inclusivity efforts
  - Create weight in anti-bullying polices
- Acknowledge and build wellness programs that reflect the complexity of health (e.g., understanding Social Determinants of Health is very important).

References:


Graphic 1: Kimberle Crenshaw's Definition of Intersectionality

Graphic 2: The Body is Not an Apology by Sonya Renee Taylor

Graphic 3: Social Determinants of Health

Links for Information About Upcoming Events

We encourage anyone interested in notifications of upcoming events, to visit these sites* and to regularly check the shared CEHD IDC Teams folder for real time information as events are shared with us. CEHD IDC Teams Folder: https://teams.microsoft.com/l/channel/19%3aSZD4gFDCoO8LEct8XSjlwY8bNxWbXXkuWEIEPmt1wSA1%40thread.tacv2/General?groupId=8e0e48f9-b8fc-4abc-a3f4-a9231846e77d&tenantId=25762251-7aa9-4c72-905f-39bf026a

WMU Walker Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnic Relations: https://wmich.edu/walkerinstitute
WMU Office of Diversity and Inclusion: https://wmich.edu/diversity/events-0
WMU Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, and Transgender Student Services: https://wmich.edu/lbgt/programs
Disability Network of Southwest Michigan: http://www.dnswm.org/events/list/
Arcus Center for Social Justice Leadership: https://arcuscenter.kzoo.edu/
SHARE: http://sharekazoo.org/
Experience WMU: https://wmich.campuslabs.com/engage/events or via the icon on the Go WMU homepage

*Please submit other sites for future publication, this list compiled by sites in which the committee is aware.
Please contact your department or unit IDC representative with ideas and suggestions:

Bright Egwim - Doctoral Student Representative
Lori Farrer - TLES Representative
Sangwoo Lee - HPHE Representative
Elijah Lewis - Undergraduate Student Representative
Nicole Lockwood-Womack - Staff Representative
Nateya Moore - TRIO and Student Success Representative
Marcy L. Peake - Chair
Selena Protacio - SPLS Representative
LaSonja Roberts - ELRT Representative
Tangela Roberts - CECP Representative
Arezoo Rojhani - FCS Representative
Vacant - Masters Level Student Representative - If you are or know of a student enrolled in a CEHD master's level program interested in applying to be the master level student representative, please send a one-page letter of interest explaining why you would like to join this committee and a resume or CV to: marcy.peake@wmich.edu by January 31, 2022. The committee will review all applicants and reach out sometime in February 2022.