

YOU CAN'T ASK THAT – FAT

A FILM REVIEW

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You Can't Ask That is a documentary style television program produced by the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC). The aims of the program are to facilitate insights into the lives of people who are often stereotyped, and to provide a platform for conversations with 'misunderstood and marginalised Australians' for example, people who are refugees, Indigenous, short-statured or transgender.

Designated topics for each episode are published in advance with calls for questions and people wanting to appear on the show. In each episode participants are filmed selecting and responding to a series of questions written on cards. The questions are submitted anonymously by members of the public and they are described as 'questions Australians want to ask but are too embarrassed to ask in person'. In this way, the participants are, in effect, being interviewed by the Australian public in a lively and compelling format. The television series is honest, forthright, humorous, and poignant in its approach. The questions are respectful, sometimes awkward, but generally intended to enhance understanding of confronting or controversial issues.

The episode titled 'Fat' was broadcast in 2016 and features five Australians who identify as being fat. The use of lived experience as a personal narrative is extremely powerful and thought provoking. The participants describe the verbal insults, exclusion, discrimination and stigma they experience in many different contexts. In the episode 'Fat', some of the questions asked include:

- Why are you so fat?
- Do people treat you differently because you are fat?

¹ You can't ask that [online image]. Retrieved August 8, 2018 from: <https://iview.abc.net.au/show/you-cant-ask-that/series/1/video/LE1517H007S00>

- When was the last time you were skinny?
- Are you worried about your health?
- Would you weigh less tomorrow if you could?
- How do you feel about the word obese?
- Why don't you eat less? Do you exercise?

This episode has significant value as a teaching tool. It allows for a rich, lived-experience portrayal that steers away from a medicalised view of obesity and presents learners with a person-centred perspective that can facilitate opportunities for reflection and deeper consideration. This is in keeping with a study by Burmeister et al., (2017, p. 49) that found 'a brief high-quality video aimed at reducing weight stigma may be an effective option for reducing weight bias'. In essence, this episode of You Can't Ask That reminds us that:

We are all human beings and deserve respect.

DISCUSSION/REFLECTION QUESTIONS

In this episode of You Can't Ask That, terminology and language are openly discussed, including phrases such as:

- 'Obese means you've failed at being fat'.
- 'I'm yet to meet a fat person who likes the word obese'.
- 'In Latin it [obese] means someone who has eaten so much they became very fat'.
- 'No one grows up saying they want to be fat'.

To be labelled as 'obese' has been shown to be unhelpful in affecting positive changes, such as seeking medical care and making lifestyle improvements. In a study conducted by Puhl et al., (2013), people preferred healthcare professionals to use the terms 'weight', 'unhealthy weight', and 'weight problem' which they considered to be more motivating and less stigmatizing than being referred to as 'fat', 'obese', or 'morbidly obese'. In this study, 19% of participants stated that they would avoid future medical appointments, and 21% would seek a new doctor if stigmatized about their weight (Puhl, 2012).

It is vital that healthcare professionals use person-centred language, irrespective of their area of practice.

- What are some good examples of inclusive language you have seen? It may be in this area of practice, or any other area where use of inclusive language is important for delivery of care.
- What are some examples of non-inclusive and discriminatory language? How does this affect the delivery of quality health care?

Jenny describes attending a weight loss meeting with her mother as a four-year-old where she saw her mother ridiculed for having gained weight at the weekly weigh in and having to wearing a pig mask. She stated:

Growing up, I felt the worst thing that I could be was fat.

- What are some of the ways that society may perpetuate the message that the worst thing to be is fat?
- How might negative messages prevent larger people from accessing health and wellbeing services?

Several of the participants in the show stated that they don't want 'obesity' to define who they are and expressed the need to be treated as individuals, with unique and individual presentations of health and wellness.

- Have you ever experienced a situation where people made assumptions about how you wanted to be treated that were wrong?
- What is your understanding of a 'weight-neutral approach'? How does this complement a person-centred care approach?

Kath stated that '*Your body size does not determine what your life is like. But sometimes other people do*'. She described an episode where she visited a healthcare professional and sobbing, stated that she was exercising 6 to 8 hours a day, experiencing manic energy and feeling very distressed and suicidal. The healthcare professional responded by saying, 'do you think you could squeeze in another 45 minutes of exercise'?

- How might an empathetic healthcare professional have responded to Kath in the interaction above?
- As a healthcare professional, how does empathy influence inform your practice?

There are several dichotomies described in this episode of You Can't Say That, broadly labelled as 'good fatty/bad fatty'. For example:

- '*An ashamed fat person is ok. If you don't show any shame, then that's a bad fatty*'.
- '*If I say I eat well, then I am a liar. If I say I eat everything in sight, then it's my fault I am fat.*'
- '*Who are you, you lazy fat person who eats too much – to claim happiness?*'

Sometimes there is tension in the delivery of health services that acceptance and non-condemnation of obesity and weight issues leads to a complicit agreement that it is ok to be large, despite evidence that this approach is likely to be detrimental to people's physical and mental health (NHMRC, 2013). Read and discuss the differing views on this topic presented in the media reports below:

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-07-21/obesity-plan-to-weigh-and-measure-children-at-school/10021260>

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4199970/All-obese-NHS-staff-wear-m-fat-badges.html>

<http://www.digitalspy.com/movies/trailers/news/a849784/i-feel-pretty-trailer-backlash-amy-schumer/>

<https://www.revelist.com/movies/fat-suit-characters/11439>

- Think about a time when you have been presented with an issue in your personal or professional life that has challenged your views on a certain topic. Were you flexible or rigid in your thinking?
- How do you/will you ensure that you are able to consider multiple viewpoints in your career as a healthcare professional?
- What are some strategies that might assist you to support larger people who may be vulnerable when accessing the healthcare system?

Minaminoshima, Kath, Jenny, Gerry and Nick all describe different influences contributing to their size, including genetic factors, eating patterns, culture, exercise, relationships with food, upbringing and generalised health/illness. Read and discuss some of the many factors that can contribute to body size in the following articles:

<https://theconversation.com/clue-to-why-some-people-are-healthy-and-obese-28759>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/obesity/causes/>

LINKS

You Can't Ask That –Series 1, Episode 7 - Fat. Available from:

<https://iview.abc.net.au/programs/you-cant-ask-that/LE1517H007S00>

The Fat Heffalump –Living with Fattitude. A blog by Kath Read, including a page of resources:

<https://fatheffalump.wordpress.com/resources-educate-yourself/>

REFERENCES

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Kyle, T. & Puhl, R. (2014). Putting people first in obesity. *Obesity*, 22(5), 1211-1211.

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Puhl, R., Peterson, J. & Luedicke, J. (2013). Motivating or stigmatizing? Public perceptions of weight-related language used by health providers. *International journal of obesity*, 37(4), 612.

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<https://www.virtualempathymuseum.com.au/>