

## ***Gender Differences: Perceptions of Obese Women versus Obese Men***

***By***

***Barbara Jaurequi, MS, LMFT, MAC***

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It seems that levels of obesity prejudice differ based on the gender of the obese person. Research has shown that obese females are subjected to more hostility and discrimination than obese males (Allison, Basile, & Yucker, 1990; Cossrow, Jeffrey, & McGuire, 2001; Dominy, et al. 2000; Kolotkin, et al. 2001; Puhl & Brownell, 2002).

Women's negative experiences regarding obesity prejudice may stem from a general ideal concerning acceptable and unacceptable weight standards for women. These standards differ from those of men in that they are far more restrictive for women. A study designed to examine societal prejudice related to being overweight used gender segregated focus groups (Cossrow, et al. 2001). Male and female participants agreed that, in general, women are held to a leaner acceptable bodyweight standard than men. Women consistently stated their belief that women are more accepting and tolerant of weight and appearance in men than men are in their acceptance and tolerance of weight and appearance in women.

A study more closely related to the current study examined weight stigmatization with six gender-specific groups of participants (Cossrow, et al. 2001). Participants were led through discussions that focused on thoughts about and experiences with weight stigmatization. Findings indicated that women reported a greater number and a greater variety of negative experiences than men. Experiences included teasing, harassment, slurs, insults, negative judgments and

assumptions, and perceived discrimination. Most importantly for the current study, participants reported that such experiences occurred at home, at work and at school.

Many studies have found that women are socialized to evaluate themselves more negatively with regard to weight than are men (Frank & Thomas, 2003; Musher-Eizenman, Holub, Edwards-Leeper, Persson & Goldstein, 2003). Other supportive research has found that women equate a thin, ideal body type with positive life success (Evans, 2003). This differs significantly from the male perspective of the same topic. In general, overweight women report more self-dissatisfaction and less optimism about their possible future life outcomes after exposure to thin, ideal female images.

The purpose of the present study is to investigate whether obesity prejudice originates in the family of origin. Specifically, the present study hypothesizes that study participants who grew up with a female obese parent or sibling will have higher levels of obesity prejudice than participants who either had no obese family members or had a male obese family member.