THE WEIGHT OF LIVING: AN ANALYSIS OF ANTI-FAT BIAS AND FATPHOBIA

IN WOMEN'S WORKING RELATIONSHIPS

by

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DEDICATION

To all my participants and every fat woman whose experiences have been dismissed,

invalidated, or ignored. I hear you.

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ABSTRACT

Societal ideas about obesity, fatness, and overweight permeate the social institutions that govern our lives. From employment, romantic relationships, education, and more, our society reinforces the stereotypes and mistreatment of fat people. Women in particular are faced with the stigma of existing in a larger body, which frequently results in fat women facing lower hourly and lifetime earnings, and limits on their occupational attainment (Fikkan and Rothblum 2011). Through ten qualitative interviews with fat women, I explore how these women navigate their workplace and working relationships. This research centers fat women and their experiences, while providing insight on the inequalities members of this group face in the working world. My findings indicate that fat women experience stigma at work and use various techniques to manage this stigma. I argue that negative perceptions about fatness manifest in the relationships women form at work and provide obstacles for fat women in attaining career success. Further, I assert that workplace cultures can reinforce the deviance of fatness.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1997 millions of people became overweight, overnight, without gaining a single pound. This was not due to overeating, broken scales, or some other individual or personal choice. Instead, nine medical experts on obesity designated by the National Institutes of Health determined that the Body Mass Index classification for overweight adults should be lowered from 27 to 25, effectively shifting millions of people from being considered a "normal" weight to overweight (Saguy 2013). This transition, along with a panic over the growing rates of obesity amongst American men and women sparked a nation-wide concern about fatness in the United States and paved the way for the Centers for Disease Control's declaration that our nation is suffering from an obesity epidemic.

But how did we get here? The framing of obesity as an epidemic, which grew later to include the label of overweight, is not how fatness was always viewed. In earlier societies, rotundness and corpulence were acknowledged as a sign of wealth and bodily capital (Strings 2012). Until the mid-19th century, excess weight was not necessarily considered a health detriment, or a sign of a moral failing fueled by gluttony. Instead, the general public, medical practitioners, and news and magazine articles were more concerned with the "excessive thinness of the average American" (Strings 2012:36). A shift, fueled by and intersected with classism, sexism, and racism, occurred after this time that conflated slenderness with temperance and self-discipline, characteristics of what Europeans in power considered attributes of the superior, white, race (Strings 2012). This shift established the groundwork for the association of fatness with gluttony, unintelligence, laziness, and indolence, connotations that have carried over into the 21st

century. In this way, our understanding and perception of fatness is shaped and intersected by structures of inequalities based on gender, race, and economic status.

Today, with the shadow of the ever-growing "obesity epidemic" looming over our lives, our society grapples with standards of beauty that are unattainable by the average American, increasingly so for the average American woman. We are bombarded with images of thinness as the ideal body type and advertised diet supplements and meal systems to achieve the preferred look. Bodies falling outside of this standard, like those that are deemed overweight and obese by the BMI scale, are at the mercy of the beauty, diet, and weight loss industries who purport that being fat is deviant, and a failure that can be remedied by their products (Gordon 2020).

The effect of framing obesity as a public health crisis is the newest perpetuation of the belief that obese and overweight people are deviant or have committed a moral failing simply by existing in a fat body. Societal ideas about obesity, fatness, and overweight permeate the institutions that govern our lives, including family, work, the media, the medical field, and more. Negative perceptions about fatness manifest in the form of anti-fat bias and fatphobia, or "the attitudes, behaviors, and social systems that specifically marginalize, exclude, underserve, and oppress fat bodies" (Gordon 2020:10). Anti-fat bias and fatphobia is gendered such that women in particular are expressly subject to judgment and the characterization of being deviant. Using a stigma and deviance framework, I examine experiences of fat women at work, and explore how they encounter anti-fat bias and fatphobia.

Gendered Bodies

Beauty and body expectations can be difficult to define within a society that is constantly cycling through trends. Gender shapes what we think about bodies and how they should look. From an early age, we are socialized to conceive fat as bad. In Disney movies, children are shown that the ugly, ignorant, and unlovable characters are also fat (Twobin et al. 2008). On our TV screens, the internet, and essentially every form of media, we are shown advertisements that feature the fair-skinned, thin, and perfectly toned bodies of models, actors, and celebrities (Greenberg and Worrell 2005) and we are bombarded by these images daily. Beyond negative characterizations as the fat friend or fat villain, there is a scarcity of fat females within popularly consumed media at all (Fikkan and Rothblum 2011).

Slenderness and the ability to control one's weight is a central part of embodying Western beauty standards (Forbes et al 2007). Women's value is associated with their attractiveness and ability to meet societal standards of beauty (Wolf 1991). Part of this standard is being thin and maintaining thinness at all costs (Carneiro et al. 2013). Any deviation from being thin is met with scrutiny, and as a woman's weight increases, the stigma of being fat or overweight grows as well. This thin-ideal, though far from the reality of the average US woman's body at 38 inches in the waist and 170 pounds (National Center for Health Statistics 2021), reflects the impossible standard that women are held to, and shapes the way that fat bodies are interpreted and scrutinized. What remains clear within our Western society amidst this cycling of beauty trends and standards, is the idea that thinness is synonymous with beauty and the ideal body type

(Wolf 1991). Specifically, women are expected to be thin, and this expectation paves the way for fat women to face discrimination. Additionally, the centering of thinness as the ideal standard furthers the notion that fat people are deviant.

Deviance and Stigma

The concepts of deviance and stigma help us better understand and identify what behaviors are deemed socially acceptable and how to react to behaviors outside of the norm. Erving Goffman specifically outlined the ways in which stigma can impact individuals deemed to be deviant in some capacity, creating a spoiled identity (1963). Suffering from a spoiled identity can mean that other members of society outright avoid or reject any association with a person harboring stigma, though this depends on whether the stigmatized person is held responsible for their deviance (DeJong 1980). Stigma can be experienced in different ways, including felt and expressed stigma. Felt stigma is often defined as the way that individuals perceive that they have been discredited or stigmatized, while expressed stigma takes the form of direct actions or behaviors from others that work to discredit someone (Jacoby 1994; Brewis et al. 2011).

Being fat, overweight, or obese has been considered deviant in our society for some time, resulting in both felt and expressed stigma. Despite this, the study of fat deviance, anti-fat bias, and fatphobia, (much like the literature on these topics), has remained largely unstudied and lacking the input of fat people. The framing of this deviance has transformed throughout history, but the effect of framing obesity as anything other than a neutral descriptor of the body is the perpetuation of the belief that obese and overweight people are deviant and are usually at fault for their own

stigmatization. Oftentimes, those that express disgust or disapproval for obesity and overweight, believe that the condition is the result of a personal failing in making proper choices (Saguy 2013). Gluttony, laziness, or issues with self-control are often assumed to be part of fat peoples' lives (DeJong 1980).

Two common frames used to conceptualize the deviance and stigma associated with being fat include the moral framing and the medical and public health framing. Even before the well-studied, intense medical focus on obesity in the US, it was widely believed that fat people had committed an individual moral failing just by existing in an overweight body. As previously discussed, this was not always the case, yet the eventual religious and spiritual influence on the framing of fatness as bad laid the foundation for the framing of fatness as a morality issue. Moral frames represent deviance as badness, or sin (Pfohl 2009). The association of fat with sin, immorality, and poor self-control are all components of the moral framing of fat deviance. Central to the moral framing of obesity and present in these perceptions of fat, is the idea that fat people are wholly and independently at fault for their excess body weight and size. Like other deviant behaviors involving the body, the perception of fat deviance eventually evolved into a medicalized problem, yet the immoral framing of fatness remains as one way that we interpret and characterize fat people in our fatphobic and anti-fat society.

The framing of obesity as an epidemic has expanded the issue into a public health crisis that today impacts public policy and the daily lives of children and adults deemed too large or fat by medical and societal standards. Thus, the individual and private concern between a fat person, their health, and their doctor has been transitioned into a

public health issue. A medical and public health framing suggests that deviant behavior can be explained as the result of physical, emotional, or mental abnormalities in the form of sickness, disease, or some other condition outside of the norm. These abnormalities are believed to be present in inferior or deficient bodies, which impacts a person's ability to make rational choices (Pfohl 2009). This makes the medical frame appealing, as it is thought to lessen some of the blame on individuals who engage in deviant behaviors, (in the case of this research, being fat), and accounts for complexities that the immorality frame fails to acknowledge. Yet, fat people still endure anti-fat bias and weight-discrimination within this framing, demonstrating how perceived personal responsibility for being overweight factors into society's reactions to a person's fatness, but does not entirely neutralize the deviance of being fat (DeJong 1980).

The reality is that deviance and its effects are much more nuanced and complicated than the medical and public health frame implies. Fat people remain deviant under any framing, and face felt and expressed stigma as a result. The medical frame, while decreasing some of the deviance and stigma associated with fatness, still reinforces the idea that being fat is synonymous with sickness and a spoiled identity. Both frames offer unique understandings and beliefs about the deviance of fat people and those responsible for classifying fatness as deviant. While not all-encompassing, the moral and medical and public health frames represent common ways that fat deviance is interpreted and demonstrate how society maintains the idea that being fat is deviant and stigmatized.

Despite the societal obsession with thinness, the fear of fatness, and the felt and expressed stigmatization of fat people previously described, government programs and initiatives designed to fight the obesity epidemic have failed. Any attempts to cull the growing number of obese people within the US have been unsuccessful, but these initiatives have successfully deepened the public's distaste for larger bodies (Gordon 2020). The research on bias and discrimination against fat people is well-studied (DeJong 1980; Hebl and Heatherton 1998; Rothblum et al. 1988; Jasper and Klassen 1990; Pingitore et al. 1994; Widerman and Hurst 1998; Halpern 1999). Fatphobia and anti-fat bias is present in every area of fat peoples' lives, which impedes their access to education, romantic partnerships, and success at work.

In just one example, on a self-report measure within a study using the Implicit Attitudes Test, participants made up of researchers and clinicians attending a conference on obesity rated fat people as "lazy," "stupid," and "worthless" (Schwartz et al. 2003). One study found that nearly 75% of fat black and white female participants reported "one or more specific barriers to health care," including "disrespectful treatment, embarrassment about being weighed, negative attitudes by health care providers, unsolicited advice to lose weight, or the use of gowns, medical equipment, or exam tables that were too small." (Amy et al. 2006). Within the education system, fat people also face social consequences for their larger size, negatively affecting fat student's acceptance to universities (Canning and Mayer 1966), their experiences socializing in the classroom, and their opportunities for success in higher education (Fikkan and Rothblum 2011). Anti-fat bias also reaches into the personal, romantic lives of fat women. Research shows

that fat women are less likely to date, marry, and be rated as sexually desirable as smaller women (Fikkan and Rothblum 2011).

The statistics on anti-fat bias and fatphobia within the workplace are particularly damning. Fat, female workers are rated more negatively than thin women on personal hygiene, self-discipline, their potential for supervisory roles, and their personal appearance (Rothblum et al. 1988). Both male and female participants report less interest in working with a fat female employee than working with others, including fat men (Jasper and Klassen 1990). Fat women, (more than fat men), are less likely to be recommended for hiring (Pingitore et al. 1994). These factors, along with overall trends of "lower occupational attainment and lower hourly and lifetime earnings for fat women," even when controlling for relevant variables like education and class, represent the ways that being fat negatively impacts fat people's, especially fat women's, opportunities for employment and income (Fikkan and Rothblum 2011).

Despite the research and literature supporting the claim that fat women face weight-based discrimination at work and other areas of their lives, the voices of actual fat women and their experiences of anti-fat bias and weight discrimination have largely been left absent from the conversation. The literature on weight discrimination at work, and the lack of perspective from fat women, motivated me to pursue this topic. This research was designed to better understand how fat women are affected by anti-fat bias and fatphobia in the workplace. My research questions addressed: (1) How do fat women experience being fat in today's world, specifically at work? (2) Is there stigma associated

with being fat in the workplace? How is this stigma felt by fat women? and (3) How do these women manage stigma?

<div align="center">METHODOLOGY</div>

Research Design

I conducted 10 semi-structured interviews using Zoom. The interview protocol included questions covering three thematic categories (general background; work history and workplace experiences; and discrimination). Before beginning the interview, I asked participants if they were comfortable with the use of the word fat to describe their body. Nine out of ten participants stated that they preferred the term fat, while one participant stated she preferred the descriptor of "big" or "bigger" instead. Due to this preference, the words big or bigger were used to replace the terms fat and fatter within the interview questions for that participant's interview.

Demographics

Interview candidates self-identified as matching a specific set of criteria to participate in this research. First, participants had to be at least 18 years old and identify as a woman. Additionally, participants had to wear a US size 20 or above to be eligible. I used the fat rights activist's classification of mid-fat (size 20 to 24), superfat (size 26-32), and infinifat (sizes 34 and higher) bodies to determine which sizes to include (Gordon 2020:9). Participants were recruited using snowball sampling and social media outreach on the platforms Instagram and Facebook. I used strategic posts on these sites to recruit the initial respondents, which included a virtual flier detailing the call for participants. The flier was then shared to community pages on Facebook. Several participants reposted

or shared the flier to their own social media pages, which allowed additional potential participants to learn about the opportunity and reach out.

More than 15 interested parties reached out about participating in the research, but only 11 were interviewed. Out of these 11 participants, 10 interviews were included in the analysis, which I explain below. Out of the 10 interview participants that were included in the analysis, 9 women identified as Caucasian, and 1 woman identified as African American. The participants ranged in age from the early 20s to late 40s and held jobs across a variety of fields including food service, pre k -12 education, higher education, tech, social media, and fitness. Several participants fell in between exact sizes, but 3 of the women fluctuated between a US size 18 and 20, 4 women wore between a US size 20 and 22, and 3 women wore a US size 24 or above. Participants were assigned pseudonyms following their interview. See Table 1 in Appendix A for more information on the demographics of the sample.

Interview Protocol

Interviews typically lasted between 60 to 90 minutes and were audio and video-recorded through Zoom. The use of Zoom allowed for a more diverse group of participants across the United States because I was not limited to local respondents. Zoom also provided additional advantages such as building rapport, convenience, and offering simplicity and user-friendliness (Archibald et al. 2019). Each interview was transcribed using the caption feature on Zoom, then reviewed and revised as necessary based on the audio recording. While I analyzed 10 interviews, which are a part of this research, I conducted 11 interviews in total. Following the completion of the first 10

interviews, the audio and video recording of 4 interviews were lost, due to a computer

failure. The data was unable to be retrieved. Because of this, 3 of the lost interviews were

repeated with the same participants. The fourth participant was not able to be reached. In

place of that interview, I recruited a new participant and conducted the interview

following the same protocol.

Positionality

The idea that those who are affected by their own research interests are incapable

of being objective has permeated the critiques of social research. Recently, however,

there has been a shift in the way that the academic community feels about those with a

personal stake in their own research. Sandra Harding, along with others, has argued that

one way to address biases within academia and research is by conducting research from

the perspective of the oppressed and marginalized (Harding 1991). In this way, I assert

that the best-produced knowledge on the experiences and lives of fat people, is from fat

people themselves. Like Saguy, I contend that "being fat, rather than discrediting,

represents a form of personal authority" within research on fatness. As a fat woman

myself, while conducting this research I was informed by not only previous research and

literature, but by "firsthand experience with weight-based stigma and living in a fat body"

(Saguy 2013:36). Following in this relatively new, though still disputed, line of thinking,

I positioned myself within this research as a fat woman who has experienced anti-fat bias

and fatphobia, both at work and in other areas of my life. My experiences as a fat woman

allowed me to build rapport and trust more easily with my participants. It also allowed

me to reflect on my own experiences when designing my research questions and interview probes.

Data Analysis

I employed a grounded analysis approach to assess and analyze the data from the 10 interviews. Each transcription was reviewed and revised using the audio and visual recordings of the interviews. Following this, I read each transcription multiple times as I searched for any initial patterns or themes within the data. This iterative process (Hesse-Biber 2016) resulted in several emerging themes including implicit and explicit examples of anti-fat bias and fatphobia, participant feelings of hyper-visibility and invisibility at work, and specific participant behaviors to name a few. I coded each transcription using different colors for the emerging themes. After the first coding session these larger conceptual themes were broken down into more specific thematic topics for easy comparison. The volume of data was reduced during this process, as sections of text relating to different themes were extracted from the transcription and placed into specific word documents with other, similar examples. I was able to further connect participant experiences or comments from these word documents and draw larger conclusions as to what themes and patterns were present in the data.

RESULTS

I identified three major themes that connected with my research questions: felt stigma, expressed stigma, and stigma management strategies. Felt stigma encompassed participant narratives of workplace situations that shaped how they felt seen or perceived by others. Expressed stigma included participant descriptions of attitudes, words, and

actions that stigmatized them at work. Stigma management strategies consisted of how participants recounted their reactions and responses to felt and expressed stigma in the workplace. Each of these major themes were separated into three smaller thematic topics and discussed more below.

Felt Stigma

A person experiences felt stigma when they perceive that they are being discredited, even without an actor's words or actions confirming stigmatization (Jacoby 1994; Brewis et al. 2011). Felt stigma is thought to be at its greatest in cases where a person cannot conceal their stigmatized status. Existing in a fat body is something that cannot be concealed or easily disguised. Because of this, fat women experience felt stigma in all areas of their lives, including work (Saguy 2011). This was demonstrated throughout interviews with all ten participants.

Paradox of Visibility

Five respondents reported feeling hypervisible at work, which frequently translated into concern over their appearance. Taylor described starting a new teaching position during her graduate program.

> "When I got to grad school, I will say I did feel much more visible in terms of like, there just weren't other fat people around, there weren't, and it was like this is a really weird thing for me." (Taylor, 28).

She explained that the lack of representation of other fat students in her cohort and environment separated her from others. Mary described how mundane tasks become an issue of perception.

> "There's just that like constant awareness of how people perceive you like if you're walking up the steps, you don't want to sound like you're out of breath, even if your peers that are skinny are sounding like they're out of breath, like you just have that constant awareness of the need to be demonstrating something more that separates you from your body." (Mary 43).

Mary's statement represented the pervasiveness of this stigma, a sentiment that was shared by other participants. Emma noted that her physique, and maintaining a certain image, was essential to her career even as she was just beginning it.

> "I'm starting my corporate career, so I'm thinking about the next 30 years which is an insane amount of work. And so, you're kind of thinking about, I always want to be the best, like…go all the way up, that's obviously corporate culture. And with that, of course, comes, okay, how do I make my physique the best?" (Emma 33).

Workplaces with zero to few other fat women present were often connected with these feelings of hypervisibility. Participants explained that fat women like themselves were not reflected in upper management or senior positions at their workplaces. Because of this the respondents felt like they stood out. Although respondents frequently felt hypervisible, three reported feeling invisible at the same time.

> "I think being fat in education…I don't know that I could say for sure, but it certainly feels as though sometimes I was passed up for opportunities…I think it's so often where I'm invisible in an office setting." (Nicole, 32).

> "People tend to kind of glance over me. There's been other jobs I've had, where people have really seen me...but people just tend to kind of glance over you…like you're not there sometimes. It's almost like I'm just a little invisible." (Mia, 24).

Overlooked and Excluded

Five participants described feeling excluded and overlooked at work.

> "It's never explicit, it's always subtle…like feeling on the edges of core groups of friends, and they always liked me, but I just never was all the way in, and everybody else was thin. I always felt maybe a little bit on the outskirts…there's a lot of different reasons it could be, too. But I do think that one of them was that I

just don't look like what people think cool people look like…I definitely was not invited to the things on the weekends." (Cathy, 28).

"I've definitely felt excluded by other white women in my department, I think that's not just about body type. It's about all the things that go with it, like self-expression…I will walk into a room with other people, and everybody else who walks in, will be acknowledged. I would not be." (Taylor, 28).

Cathy and Taylor recounted instances of being left out of conversations and plans with coworkers.

"Back when I worked at my previous job, I was actually passed up for a position that I should have gotten, for sure. I mean…it should have been my job, and in the end, it was given to a man…but you know, when I think about it, I think, does my weight have anything to do with it?" (Ava, 48).

"I really gunned hard for a promotion before I left my last job, and I never got it…I tried for 2 years...but my white male coworker, who has similar credentials to me…got the promotion to manager. But the only thing that was really different is that I'm fat…it really felt by the end of the whole process of me…trying to get this promotion, that I was the pushy fat lady in the office…It's not like someone was like 'you are fat, so you don't get the promotion,' But it happens in all these subtle ways, where no one in leadership or in power at the office, when I was there, was a fat person." (Nicole, 32).

In more extreme cases, respondents like Nicole and Ava described their concern that their weight played a part in their being passed up for a promotion. This paradox of hypervisibility and invisibility made participants feel like their bodies were at the forefront of coworkers, managers, and clients' perceptions of them. Respondents worried that their weight was discrediting, and that this discrediting nature meant that their other qualities, thoughts, and opinions were ignored.

Impact of Virtual Spaces

While fatness is not an identity that can be concealed, virtual spaces allow for some ability to control one's image. Five participants reported that remote or online work had made an impact on their working experience. Emma described her transition from in-person sales to remote work, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

> "I think in sales there's a lot of very privileged thin people who are selling, cause they look good and they're nice to talk to. But selling online kind of removes that element and I think that's helped me be more successful during this time. Unfortunately, that's just how it is in corporate America." (Emma, 33).

> "Whenever I'm in an office space…I'm aware of the way that I'm sitting. Or I wonder how I look to people who are sitting at another desk…if they look at me, is my shirt untucked? Is it getting caught on like a roll or something? And so when I'm around other people I'm always more aware of what my appearance is like to them…but then, working from home, I can just kind of be more myself, and I feel so much more comfortable and relaxed. And I actually can get more work done because I'm not spending half my time thinking about how I look sitting in a certain position." (Mia, 24).

Mia's reflection on working from home demonstrated how remote work and virtual spaces afforded her the opportunity to worry less about how others perceive and potentially discredit her body. Despite Emma and Mia's experiences, the difference between in-person and remote work was not always described as a benefit.

> "When I have meetings virtually, I'm always like, okay, do my shoulders look broad? And I am constantly trying to make myself look smaller…another thing is the camera height, I'm like oh, I can't put the camera too low…my double chin will show." (Ava, 48).

Ava explained that while she was provided some comfort working from home, she still felt consumed by the need to look a certain way and make herself as small as possible.

Typically, coworkers were the source of the perceived stigmatization within respondents' work environments. The use of "feels like," "I think," "I felt," and other phrases as prefaces to the experiences or feelings shared by participants was a common theme throughout the interviews. These phrasings point to the felt nature of this particular type of stigma. The respondents were noting that while they may not have specific evidence of discrimination or exclusion in these experiences, they still felt ignored, closely scrutinized, or observed and overlooked. Feeling isolated and hypervisible negatively impacted participants' working experience, both in terms of how they felt emotionally and mentally at work, and their ability to focus on their responsibilities.

Expressed Stigma

Expressed, or what is also commonly referred to as enacted stigma, is more overt than its felt counterpart. Expressed stigma can be defined as the words or actions of other people used to discredit or disparage another person (Brewis et al. 2011). Fat women experience expressed stigma outside of and within workspaces (Saguy 2011). Expressed stigma encompasses both unmistakable instances of anti-fat bias and fatphobia and more subtle and nuanced expressions of discrimination.

I use the phrase expressed stigma to describe attitudes, words, and actions that discredit, discriminate against, and marginalize fat people. All ten participants reported experiencing at least one instance of expressed stigma in the workplace. Participant descriptions of expressed stigma fell into one or more of the following categories: workplace-sanctioned weight loss campaigns, discussions about diets and bodies, and overt and egregious instances of anti-fatness.

Workplace-sanctioned Weight Loss

Four participants recounted how their workplaces either attempted to or established weight loss campaigns at work. Some of these workplace initiatives were part of a broader health and wellness goal, tied to employees' health insurance plans.

> "We had one program that was company-wide, related to our insurance, and…it connected to a lower insurance premium if you participated. They checked your BMI and…it wasn't necessarily who improved the most with their BMI, it was more like you have to do the test in the beginning and then you have to do a follow up test, and then you have to commit to doing 4 or 5 health activity things that they assigned. We also had, for a while, a wellness committee where we would literally do a weigh-in every Monday." (Ava, 48).

> "We've done a step challenge, where you see how many steps you can get in. We're never forced to participate in anything like that, but we do go through our health insurance, and if you do a health screening every year, you get points in your health savings account depending on your results, if you're in a healthy range for stuff. So, they do those health screenings at the office, which I think is good for access for a lot of people. However, then you're under pressure in front of your colleagues to go do it, right, and immediately share your results. And then it's 'Oh, yeah, they told me I was so fat in there ha ha ha!' So, then you're just having to hear that repeatedly when they are there for those couple of days." (Emma, 33).

Nicole described how the human resources department at her job promoted a workplace Weight Watchers group.

> "HR started Weight Watchers at work…there was like a get 10,000 steps a day challenge and you could be on teams with each other, and you're supposed to do the best and that also sucks, because like, who's thinking about disability rights in that? So that was really hard for me, to know that the organization that I worked for thinks that weight equals health." (Nicole, 32).

Step challenges, BMI screenings, and weight loss programs like Weight Watchers were all common examples of how participants' workplaces attempted to foster health and wellness at work. Unfortunately, these challenges and campaigns oftentimes left

participants feeling excluded or frustrated. Participants questioned why their health or physical ability was being equated to their weight, and what that meant for their workplace culture and ethics, as evidenced by Nicole's statement above.

Discussions on Diets and Bodies

Eight participants recounted frequent workplace discussions between coworkers, managers, and clients that centered on dieting or their dissatisfaction with their own, or others', bodies. Emma, who worked for a food and beverage sales company commented:

> "If someone's having a non-diet soda, they'll be like, 'Oh, this is my treat for the day' and…of course, with any snacks it's like 'Oh, this is so bad. I shouldn't be eating this.' It's constant…folks always talking about how they need to lose weight…There's a lot of folks that have been there for a really long time, sometimes for 25, 35 years…when those old photos get broken out, they're like 'Oh, god, look at how small I used to be…' There's just a lot of that. (Emma, 33).

Sabrina, a 24-year-old working in food service, recalled an experience where a fat woman was denied a position at the fast-food business she was working at the time.

> "We had someone come in for an interview, and she was a bigger woman…and my coworkers made a bunch of comments to the manager that was interviewing her like 'You shouldn't hire her, she's not going to fit back here,' and commenting on her weight and the size of her butt. I told them that was discrimination, but she still wasn't hired." (Sabrina, 24).

Others described coworkers' passing comments and attitudes about eating and food at work.

> "It's like every time someone's eating something, and they're like, 'Oh, I just ate so much like I feel like a whale, I'm so fat." (Mia, 24).

> "We were always seeing who can lose the most weight, who can be the most active, who cannot eat any fast food for the longest period of time. There was always that diet culture mentality." (Ava, 48).

Participants described how discussions around dieting and bodies were frequent at work. Diet and body talk reinforced the expressed stigma participants experienced and demonstrated that the respondents' bodies fell outside of mainstream body ideals. These comments and conversations around dieting and physique served as reminders to the participants that their bodies were not of the desired standard. Instead, respondents were repeatedly reminded that the people they encounter at work actively avoid existing in a larger body. The pervasive quality of these conversation topics meant that participants were typically unable to escape discussions that centered on weight and food.

Egregious Examples of Anti-fatness

Five participants provided examples of egregious anti-fatness that they experienced through work. Cathy and Emma worked traditional jobs but also earned a portion of their income working as a content creator and virtual fitness instructor, respectively, on social media. This online presence, which centered on their bodies, opened each of them to more online hate and body-shaming.

> "As always with the Internet there's some really wild comments that are made as well. Many jokes that are like, 'This is the body that I don't want to look like, why would I hire a trainer or take a fitness class to not look like that,' and 'Why would you hire a trainer that looks like that?'" (Emma, 33).

After she captioned a post on her social media account explaining why representation of fat bodies like hers is valuable, Cathy was met with a disgruntled direct messenger.

> "They were like, 'I don't follow you because you're obese and proud, I follow you because you're joyful and I love your joy'" (Cathy, 28).

The anonymous nature of the internet likely contributes to the amount and extent of hateful comments these women endure but are representative of the attitudes towards fat women.

Other participants, with more traditional working environments, still experienced the expressed stigma of egregious anti-fatness. Charlotte, a 40-year-old professor, along with one male supervisor and an additional male chaperone took a group of students on a trip abroad. While there, and on two separate occasions, Charlotte's colleagues made inappropriate comments about her body. Charlotte purchased some local art prints while on the trip. The prints depicted fat women performing everyday tasks. While sharing the images with her students and colleagues, the male chaperone interjected.

> "I was showing the little prints that I bought, and he said, 'Oh, did you buy those to remind yourself of what you used to look like? Because you know you need to lose weight, right?'" (Charlotte, 40).

This was a shocking and upsetting event on its own, but Charlotte described how it was compounded later in the trip.

> "My boss, a professor…he said it in Spanish, but most of our students who came, and I can understand Spanish. He asked some of the community leaders, he pointed to me and said something like 'Do you have any community members as fat as her?'" (Charlotte, 40).

Sabrina experienced an equally upsetting situation with one of her managers while working at a fast-food business.

> "We did have one manager who would make fun of me, specifically for my weight. Like he would make a face and say 'ew' and stuff when I bent down, and I guess he thought I couldn't hear it, but he no longer works there. He would say it when I was bending down to clean out the fridge." (Sabrina, 24).

Each participant's description of remarks and responses to their bodies represents overt manifestation of anti-fat bias and fatphobia in the workplace. Commenters, colleagues, and managers all felt entitled to make observations about respondents' bodies or abilities.

My analysis provides examples of expressed stigma in all ten participants' interviews, in the form of workplace-sanctioned weight loss campaigns, discussions about diets and bodies, and overt and egregious instances of anti-fatness. Weight loss campaigns tied to their health insurance premiums emphasized their workplaces' conflation of health and weight. Diet culture and discussions of body standards reinforced the notion of their discredited bodies. Instances of outright anti-fatness further centered participants' bodies as stigmatized. The attitudes, words, and actions of others in the workplace marginalized each of the participants in a specific way. Each of these categories encompassed uncomfortable, embarrassing, or frustrating experiences for the participants, negatively impacting their working experience and feelings.

Stigma Management Strategies

All participants described experiencing anti-fat bias and fatphobia at work. They discussed both felt and expressed stigma at one or more workplaces, on more than one occasion. These experiences of anti-fat bias and fatphobia had a direct impact on their behaviors and thoughts while both preparing for and attending work. Specifically, each participant described taking measures to avoid facing further stigmatization. I refer to these measures as participants employing specific stigma management strategies to mitigate and cope with workplace anti-fat bias. These strategies varied broadly, but participant descriptions covered a range of behaviors that were often similar in nature to

one another. These strategies included adopting an overachiever ethic, avoiding eating

and food at work, and not reporting instances of anti-fat bias and fatphobia.

Labeled as Lazy

Fear of being labeled lazy or unmotivated at work was a common feeling amongst

participants. Six of the women interviewed described adopting an overachiever ethic to

avoid this characterization.

> "Oh, yeah, I am a perfectionist, an overachiever. I have to be the best at everything when it comes to anything workwise…and I do think a lot of it is because that's where I feel good…I beat myself up so much about the weight stuff that then I overcompensate…I do think in a work environment that I get concerned…I try to overcompensate with my ability, because I'm thinking, do they really think I'm lazy and unmotivated? Well, my goodness, they're not gonna think I'm lazy and unmotivated because they're gonna see it in my work…I think that strangely connects to me overcompensating, because I don't want people to think I'm being lazy and unmotivated, or like I don't care about my body, or don't care about life, or whatever that may be." (Ava, 48).

I use the term overachiever ethic to represent participants' descriptions of excessive effort

in the workplace to avoid negative perceptions from coworkers, clients, or supervisors.

Charlotte, a 40-year-old professor, described using an overachiever ethic to ensure that

others respect her in the workplace:

> "I can't say it's definitely because I'm fat but I'm sure fatness has something to do with it, because I know without a doubt that I want to prove that I'm good enough, despite my body. And that's not always how I feel, I'm not always walking around thinking that, like thinking 'I hope they like me, even though I'm fat.' But it's hard to avoid that concern given that there's you know, not only statistics telling us that discrimination is happening based on fatness, but obviously interactions I've had, have confirmed that I'm being judged based on my body, and by people. I think, you know, even the people who I'd like to believe respect me as a person, I can't be sure, so I definitely feel driven to prove that. As a fat woman, I need to be an overachiever to prove that I'm good enough, despite people's prejudices about me as a fat person."

Other participants reported an overachiever ethic while still internally working through their motivations to appear competent. Nicole, a woman in her mid 20s working in academia, stated:

> "Because of my weight I have always tried to over-excel, so that no one could say anything about me being lazy or not intelligent or not knowledgeable. So that's definitely been something that I have grappled with as well, like you know, not always being perfect. Kind of like, wanting to be the best. But also, like, why do I want to be the best? Do I want to be the best because I love my job, and I'm passionate about it, or do I want to be the best, because I'm one of two fat members on the team?"

Participants recognized that they worked harder in their roles to specifically circumvent being labeled indolent or unproductive. The drive to achieve in the workplace, as described by the participants, demonstrates a stigma management strategy aimed at mitigating the deviance associated with fatness. Being fat is an identity that is not concealable. Because of this, the participants discussed taking attention away from their bodies and instead drawing the focus to their ability to reach goals and be productive at their jobs.

Food Restriction at Work

Respondents reported restricting their food consumption at work. Five participants described anxiety around eating in front of others and at work. One participant, Cathy, described deliberately packing a "balanced meal" to prevent any unwanted comments or feelings of shame over what she ate.

> "Still, I was eating like the entire time I was working, and I was experiencing a lot of internalized shame, and like, I don't remember if anybody ever said anything then, but I know after that like going into different workplaces, when I'm packing my lunch, I'm fucking certain that it is something that looks like a balance meal."

Other participants, including Ava, recounted a more general discomfort associated with

eating at work.

> "I don't usually eat in the presence of other people when it comes to my job. I'm
> not comfortable in that setting at all, for sure." (Ava, 48).

Mia explained that when coworkers ordered food in, or went out for lunch, she felt like

she should not join them.

> "I just always felt like I had to say no, or like they couldn't see me eating anything
> that wasn't healthy."

Emma, a 33-year-old woman working in sales and as a virtual fitness instructor, related

how her relationship with eating at work has transformed over time.

> "Early on, I would have worried about if there would be comments made behind
> my back or something like that and now, I'm just like, I truly don't care if
> someone comments about what I ate behind my back, like that is a reflection on
> them and their restriction and their journey, and that sucks for them, right?"

This experience represented an interesting sentiment that was not shared by many of the

other participants. The anxiety described by respondents was oftentimes accompanied by

feelings of shame or even confusion. The women explained that they did not fully

understand where their shame or avoidance of food originated from but acknowledged

that they still spent additional time and effort to restrict their eating at work.

Ignoring Fatphobic Comments

All ten respondents reported instances of either implicit or explicit anti-fat bias or

fatphobia at work. Despite this, six participants specifically mentioned that they chose not

to report co-workers or draw attention to the problem. There were several different

motivations for not reporting workplace transgressions to their human resources

department or equivalent authority.

> "I usually just went about my business, especially like trying to break into the film and television industry. Even on the production side, it's really competitive, and they're kind of like everyone's replaceable. So, I would prefer to not be like, 'hey, this is kind of hurtful or like kind of makes me feel ignored or just unseen'."

Following various occurrences of being overlooked and passed over at a previous job,

Mia explained that she did not speak up for fear of being expendable. Olivia, a 33-year-

old woman, described a previous position working as a resident assistant on her college

campus, and how she and other people were pushed to the back of staff and campus

promotional photos to make way for thinner, smaller women and muscled men in the

front.

> "I knew that standing up was only gonna make me look worse in the eyes of my bosses and their bosses, so I just did what was asked of me."

Though it disappointed her, Olivia did not mention it to her boss for fear of coming off as

a problem. Both women explained that they wanted to avoid being seen as a disruption or

problem at work.

Three additional participants chose to not report fatphobic comments directly

made by coworkers. They were concerned about the repercussions of reporting more

overt instances of anti-fat bias and fatphobia. As described earlier, two male supervisor's

made direct comments on Charlotte's weight and body while on a faculty-led trip with

students. She was undecided on whether to report the men's behaviors.

> "I was really shocked and hurt obviously, right, and it sucks because there's no recourse. It would have hurt my career, without a doubt, to have taken the two of

them to task for what were absolutely inappropriate workplace comments. But I was like, the problem is, I need their reference for my future career. So, if I burn this bridge, I do not have a reference. And it's hard enough already to be a fat person trying to get a job without burning a bridge for a reference, you know? So, if I reported them to HR…I would have ruined my chances at getting a good reference for jobs after that. You have to weigh up: Do I report this offense…or do I grin and bear it, knowing that to report it…puts me more at risk of either further harassment or ruining my career in the future."

Sabrina reported that while cleaning the fridge at work, a male manager would make fun of her weight and comment things like 'ew' when Sabrina bent down or over.

"After that I would never clean the fridge if he was working that shift. Because I didn't want him to talk about me. It made me feel like I was gross…I told one other coworker, and I asked her to clean the fridge, and explained to her that I felt uncomfortable doing it. So, she would do it for me. But I never told my general manager because I knew they were really close, and I felt bad because I felt like it was an issue on my part. But in retrospect, I should have said something. But I just didn't feel comfortable saying anything because at the time I was still very new, and I didn't want to cause any trouble."

She was also apprehensive about reporting inappropriate workplace behavior that related to her weight.

Nicole felt uncomfortable and frustrated when her job's human resources department established a Weight Watchers group at work. The group was promoted through pushy emails and fliers around the office. Nicole was unsure how to address the work-sanctioned weight loss effort that she believed was in bad taste and insensitive to her and her coworkers. After turning to the office for equity at her workplace, she was met with an unsatisfactory response which ultimately placed the onus back on her to file a complaint against the human resources department, to the human resource department.

"I just chose to take down the flier on the bulletin board because I was just defeated. And I posted passive-aggressively about it on social media." (Nicole, 32).

All respondents provided details on at least one specific stigma management strategy that they used in order to mitigate or cope with anti-fat bias and fatphobia in the workplace. These strategies included behaviors such as adopting an overachiever ethic, forgoing eating or restricting food consumption, and avoiding reporting anti-fat bias and fatphobia at work. The motivations behind these strategies often stemmed from the fear of being discriminated against or having their work stability or role disrupted. Participants including Sabrina, Charlotte, and Cathy specifically referenced past instances of felt or expressed stigma when explaining how they responded to negative comments or actions associated with their weight. Others alluded to stereotypes or generalizations made about fat women as motivators to mitigate discrimination from coworkers, supervisors, and clients.

CONCLUSION

Discussion

My analysis yielded three major findings. First, fat women experience felt stigma at work, often in situations where they are closely observed, excluded, or without the ability to control others' perceptions of them. Second, fat women encounter expressed stigma at work, in the form of covert and overt anti-fat bias and fatphobia. Third, these women employ various stigma management strategies to mitigate and cope with anti-fat bias from clients, coworkers, and supervisors. Based on my findings anti-fat bias and fatphobia is pervasive in the workplace, just like other areas of life, and has a substantial impact on women's work and working relationships. These findings illustrate the stigmatization that my participants experienced in the workplace. These women's lived

experiences provide nuance and context to the existing research on work and weight discrimination. They also speak to the participants' extensive efforts to avoid being characterized or treated as fat, in a society that admonishes and socially sanctions those who exist in large bodies.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this research. With 10 interviews I found important patterns, but more participants could yield more data. The participants worked in various fields, varied in age, and were diverse in other ways; however, the overwhelming majority of participants were white. I was not able to explore the connections between race and weight discrimination due to the homogeneity of my sample. There is a great need for more research on this topic. The intersections of race, gender, and class and instances of anti-fatness and fatphobia should be further investigated, and the workplace is one area of fat women's lives where this research topic could continue to be examined.

Future Research

This research is important to the field of Sociology, and on a larger level, to our society. The intolerance and prejudice that fat women face devalues their contributions at work, but more broadly, reinforces their mistreatment as commonplace and acceptable. As I write this, in 48 states across the country, it is still legal to fire someone, choose not to hire someone, turn them down for housing, or refuse to seat them at a table in a restaurant or provide them with a room in a hotel, merely because they are fat (Gordon 2020). The emotional toll of this discrimination has long-lasting effects, and bleeds into

all areas of women's lives. For this reason, other institutions, including the family, health care, and education to name a few, should be included in future and more robust research on women's experiences of anti-fat bias and fatphobia.

The vast amount of literature and research on fat people has been about them, or about the way others perceive them. Rarely has this research asked fat people themselves what their experiences are like. Comprehensive investigations of fatphobia and anti-fat bias in and outside of the workplace should center fat women, their knowledge, and their experiences. For the sake of fat people and all others alike, we should continue to seek a greater understanding and acceptance of the variety of body sizes and appearances present in our world.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Demographics

Table 1. Description of

Name	Gender Identity	Race/Ethnicity	Age	Size	Industry
Ava	Cisgender Woman	White	48	US 22	Education and Training
Cathy	Cisgender Woman	White	28	US 20/22	Education and Social Media
Charlotte	Cisgender Woman	White	40	US 22	Academia
Emma	Cisgender Woman	White	33	US 24	Sales and Social Media/Fitness
Mary	Cisgender Woman	White	43	US 24	Management and Technology
Mia	Cisgender Woman	White	24	US 18/20	Social Media
Nicole	Cisgender Woman	White	32	US 18-20/22	Academia
Olivia	Cisgender Woman	White	30	US 18/20	Early Childhood Education
Sabrina	Cisgender Woman	Black	24	US 24/26	Food Service
Taylor	Cisgender Woman	White	28	US 20/22	Academia

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Statement: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. I am interested in learning about your experiences and interpersonal relationships as a plus size woman. My goal is to learn as much as possible about your individual experiences, so I hope you feel free to share your honest responses to these questions and the issues they raise. We'll start the interview by getting some basic information about you, and then move into more specific questions.

As a fat woman myself, I rely on the word fat as a neutral descriptor for my body. Many of my friends also use this word to describe themselves, however I realize that not everyone is comfortable with the term, and your comfort is very important to me. Before we begin I would like to know, are you comfortable using the term fat? If not, is there a word you are more familiar and comfortable with, (e.g. plus size, overweight, obese, etc.)?

I. **Demographics:**

    1. Age
    2. Please identify your race
    3. What are your pronouns?
    4. What is your sexual orientation?
    5. What is your highest completed education level? (e.g. high school, some college, Associate degree, BA, MBA, JD etc.)
    6. Partnered or not
    7. Location
    8. Religion
    9. Size

II. **Background Questions:**

    1. Tell me about yourself
        i. Your hobbies, family, etc.
    2. Tell me about your time in school.
        i. Major?
        ii. Career goals?

III. **Work Questions:**

    1. Describe your work history to me.
    2. Where do you work now?
        i. Tell me about your role there.
        ii. PROBE: Walk me through your day-to-day
    3. How long have you been there?
    4. What's the culture like?

IV. **Discrimination Questions:**

    1. What has it been like working as a fat woman within your field?
    2. Has your weight impacted your opportunities for promotions or projects at work?

3. Have you faced any barriers when applying or interviewing for positions?
      i. If they provide examples to question 2 or 3 ask: How did you handle that situation?
4. Any experiences with coworkers or bosses where you felt your weight/size made a difference?

V. Concluding Questions:

1. What suggestions do you have for changing some of the issues that you have described? (if relevant)
2. Do you have any additional thoughts or experiences you would like to share that we haven't covered?

Appendix C: IRB Approval

IRB
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
Office of Research Compliance,
010A Sam Ingram Building,
2269 Middle Tennessee Blvd
Murfreesboro, TN 37129
FWA: 00005331/IRB Regn. 0003571

MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

IRBN001 - EXPEDITED PROTOCOL APPROVAL NOTICE

Tuesday, March 08, 2022

Protocol Title	***The Weight of Living: An Analysis of Anti-Fat and Fatphobia in Womens' Relationships***
Protocol ID	**22-2107 7v**

Principal Investigator	**Hannah Newcomb** (Student)	Faculty Advisor: Gretchen Webber
Co-Investigators	NONE	
Investigator Email(s)	hn2r@mtmail.mtsu.edu; Gretchen.webber@mtsu.edu	
Department	Sociology	
Funding	NONE	

Dear Investigator(s),

The above identified research proposal has been reviewed by the MTSU IRB through the **EXPEDITED** mechanism under 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110 within the category *(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior*. A summary of the IRB action is tabulated below:

IRB Action	**APPROVED for ONE YEAR**		
Date of Expiration	**2/28/2023**	Date of Approval: 3/8/22	Recent Amendment: NONE
Sample Size	TWENTY (20)		
Participant Pool	Target Population: Primary Classification: **General Adults (18 or older)** Specific Classification: **Women who wear US size 20 or higher**		
Type of Interaction	☐ Non-interventional or Data Analysis ☒ Virtual/Remote/Online interaction ☐ In person or physical interaction – Mandatory COVID-19 Management		
Exceptions	1. Audio/video recording is permitted (refer below). 2. Contact information is allowed to coordinate this research.		
Restrictions	**1. Mandatory ACTIVE Informed Consent.** **2. Other than the exceptions above, identifiable data/artifacts, such as, audio/video data, photographs, handwriting samples, personal address, driving records, social security number, and etc., MUST NOT be collected. Recorded identifiable information must be deidentified as described in the protocol.** **3. Mandatory Final report (refer last page).**		
Approved Templates	IRB Templates: IRB Flyer and Zoom Informed Consent Non-MTSU Templates: Verbal recruitment script		
Research Inducement	NONE		
Comments	NONE		

Post-approval Requirements

The PI and FA must read and abide by the post-approval conditions (Refer "*Quick Links*" in the bottom):

- ***Reporting Adverse Events:*** The PI must report research-related adversities suffered by the participants, deviations from the protocol, misconduct, and etc., within 48 hours from when they were discovered.
- ***Final Report:*** The FA is responsible for submitting a final report to close-out this protocol before 2/28/2023 (Refer to the Continuing Review section below); REMINDERS WILLNOT BE SENT. **Failure to close-out or request for a continuing review may result in penalties** including cancellation of the data collected using this protocol and/or withholding student diploma.
- ***Protocol Amendments***: An IRB approval must be obtained for all types of amendments, such as: addition/removal of subject population or investigating team; sample size increases; changes to the research sites (appropriate permission letter(s) may be needed); alternation to funding; and etc. The proposed amendments must be requested by the FA in an addendum request form. The proposed changes must be consistent with the approval category and they must comply with expedited review requirements
- ***Research Participant Compensation:*** Compensation for research participation must be awarded as proposed in Chapter 6 of the Expedited protocol. The documentation of the monetary compensation must Appendix J and MUST NOT include protocol details when reporting to the MTSU Business Office.
- ***COVID-19:*** Regardless whether this study poses a threat to the participants or not, refer to the COVID-19 Management section for important information for the FA.

Continuing Review   (The PI has requested early termination)

Although this protocol can be continued for up to THREE years, The PI has opted to end the study by 2/28/2023 **The PI must close-out this protocol by submitting a final report before 2/28/2023 Failure to close-out may result in penalties that include cancellation of the data collected using this protocol and delays in graduation of the student PI.**

Post-approval Protocol Amendments:

The current MTSU IRB policies allow the investigators to implement minor and significant amendments that would fit within this approval category. *Only **TWO** procedural amendments will be entertained per year (changes like addition/removal of research personnel are not restricted by this rule).*

Date	Amendment(s)	IRB Comments
NONE	NONE.	NONE

Other Post-approval Actions:

The following actions are done subsequent to the approval of this protocol on request by the PI/FA or on recommendation by the IRB or by both.

Date	IRB Action(s)	IRB Comments
NONE	NONE	NONE

COVID-19 Management:

The PI must follow social distancing guidelines and other practices to avoid viral exposure to the participants and other workers when physical contact with the subjects is made during the study.

- The study must be stopped if a participant or an investigator should test positive for COVID-19 within 14 days of the research interaction. This must be reported to the IRB as an "adverse event."
- The MTSU's "Return-to-work" questionnaire found in Pipeline must be filled by the investigators on the day of the research interaction prior to physical contact.
- PPE must be worn if the participant would be within 6 feet from the each other or with an investigator.
- Physical surfaces that will come in contact with the participants must be sanitized between use
- **FA's Responsibility:** The FA is given the administrative authority to make emergency changes to protect the wellbeing of the participants and student researchers during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the FA must notify the IRB after such changes have been made. The IRB will audit the changes at a later date and the FA will be instructed to carryout remedial measures if needed.

Data Management & Storage:

All research-related records (signed consent forms, investigator training and etc.) must be retained by the PI or the faculty advisor (if the PI is a student) at the secure location mentioned in the protocol

application. The data must be stored for at least three (3) years after the study is closed. Additional Tennessee State data retention requirement may apply (*refer "Quick Links" for MTSU policy 129 below*). The data may be destroyed in a manner that maintains confidentiality and anonymity of the research subjects.

The MTSU IRB reserves the right to modify/update the approval criteria or change/cancel the terms listed in this letter without prior notice. Be advised that IRB also reserves the right to inspect or audit your records if needed.

Sincerely,

Institutional Review Board
Middle Tennessee State University

Quick Links:
- Post-approval Responsibilities: http://www.mtsu.edu/irb/FAQ/PostApprovalResponsibilities.php
- Expedited Procedures: https://mtsu.edu/irb/ExpeditedProcedures.php
- MTSU Policy 129: Records retention & Disposal: https://www.mtsu.edu/policies/general/129.php