



MEDIA  
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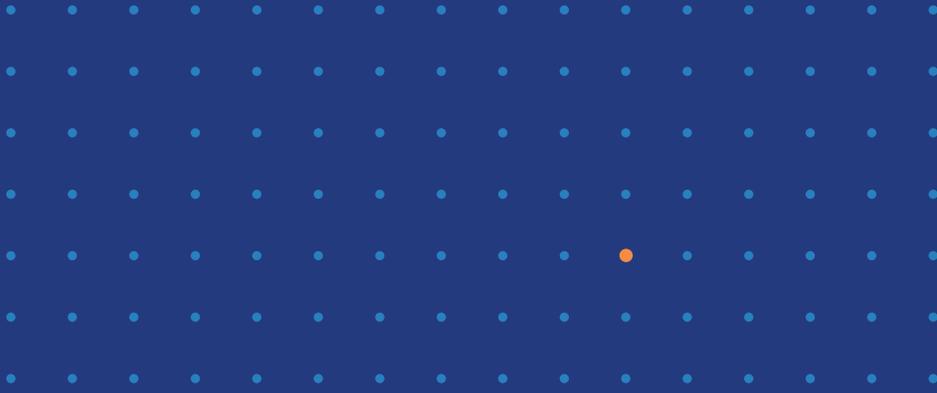
# Weight Stigma and Media: Assessing the Impact

A National Survey for the Media Empathy Foundation

This report was developed and executed by Langer Research Associates for the Media Empathy Foundation and made possible thanks to the support of Novo Nordisk Inc.

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# Executive Summary

Americans with higher body weight broadly perceive negative stereotypes, body shaming, weight-blaming and exclusion from leading roles in media portrayals of people with higher body weight. One in three feels personally disrespected at times, as many feel negative impacts on their self-esteem – and one in four reports negative mental health consequences overall.

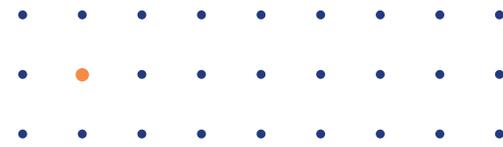
A groundbreaking survey by the Media Empathy Foundation explores these experiences and effects among a representative, national sample of more than 1,200 people with a body mass index of 30 or higher, the level for having obesity as defined by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,

accounting for 42 percent of American adults.<sup>1</sup> Results underscore both the extent of problematic media portrayals of people with higher body weight and their potential for harm – as well as indicating pathways for improvement moving forward.

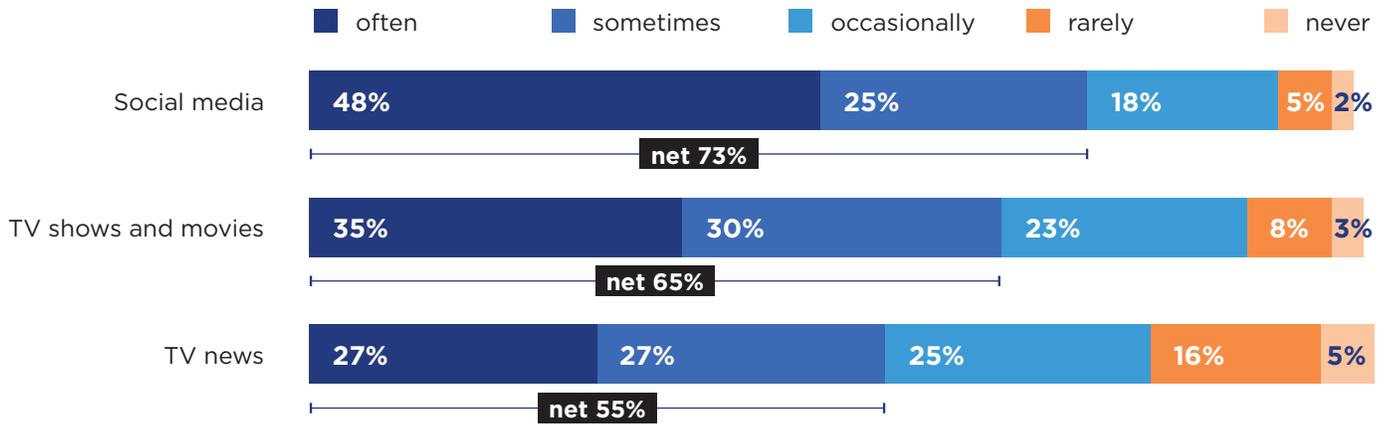
1. BMI is calculated as a person's weight divided by the square of their height. Obesity prevalence from <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/adult.html>

**Among the key findings:**

Majorities say social media (73 percent), TV shows and movies (65 percent) and TV news (55 percent) often or sometimes portray people with higher body weight in ways that reinforce negative stereotypes. Only 5 percent or fewer say this never happens.



**How often do the media reinforce negative stereotypes about people with higher body weight?**



In specific cases, roughly six in 10 say TV shows and movies often or sometimes portray people with higher body weight as the target of jokes, as unattractive and as lazy or unmotivated. Smaller majorities also see portrayals that make fun of the body size or weight of people with higher body weight, place them in storylines focused on their appearance, depict them as sloppy or disorganized and engage in body shaming.

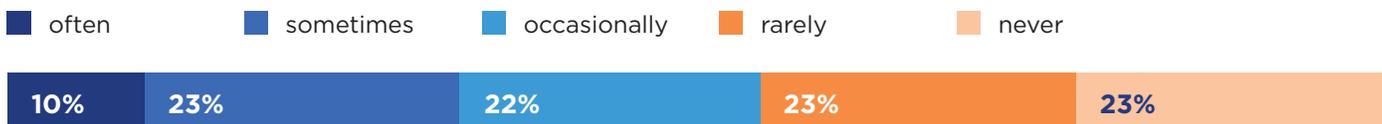
**How often do the TV shows and movies you see portray people with higher body weight in these ways?**

	Often/sometimes	Occasionally	Rarely/never
As the target of jokes, for comic relief	63%	24%	12%
As unattractive	63%	22%	14%
As lazy or unmotivated	60%	23%	17%
Making fun of their body size or weight	56%	25%	18%
In storylines that focus on their appearance	55%	25%	19%
As sloppy or disorganized	54%	27%	19%
As evil or cruel	23%	26%	50%

Eight in 10 see media exclusion of people with higher body weight from leading roles in TV shows and movies. Among those who perceive this practice of exclusion, eight in 10 say it sends a negative message.

On a personal level, one in three often or sometimes has felt disrespected by TV and movie portrayals of people with higher body weight.

### Have felt disrespected by TV show and movie portrayals of people with higher body weight



Thirty-six percent cite negative effects from media portrayals on their own body image, 33 percent on their self-esteem and 26 percent on their overall mental health. Many fewer, however, report negative impacts on their efforts to have a healthy lifestyle (16 percent), likelihood of getting the health care they need (12 percent) and likelihood of getting the mental health care they may need (11 percent).

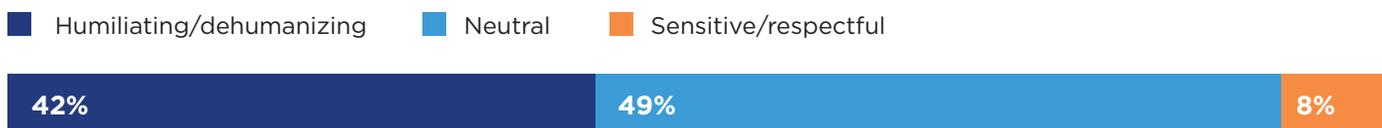
Results underscore particular pressures on women and younger adults with higher body weight, and especially, in many cases, on younger women. Women and younger adults are markedly more likely than others to have been teased or treated unfairly because of their body weight, as well as to be self-critical about their weight.

People who've been teased or treated unfairly, who direct negative feelings at themselves, younger adults and women all are more apt than others to say the TV shows or movies they see often or sometimes reinforce negative stereotypes about people with higher body weight. And they're more apt to report negative effects on their own body image, self-esteem, overall mental health and likelihood of getting the medical and mental health care they may need.

Seven in 10 overall feel that health news reports tend to blame people for their body weight. About four in 10 also say the news media tend to show images of people with higher body weight that are humiliating or dehumanizing, while only 8 percent see such portrayals as sensitive or respectful.

Results underscore particular pressures on women and younger adults with higher body weight, and especially, in many cases, on younger women.

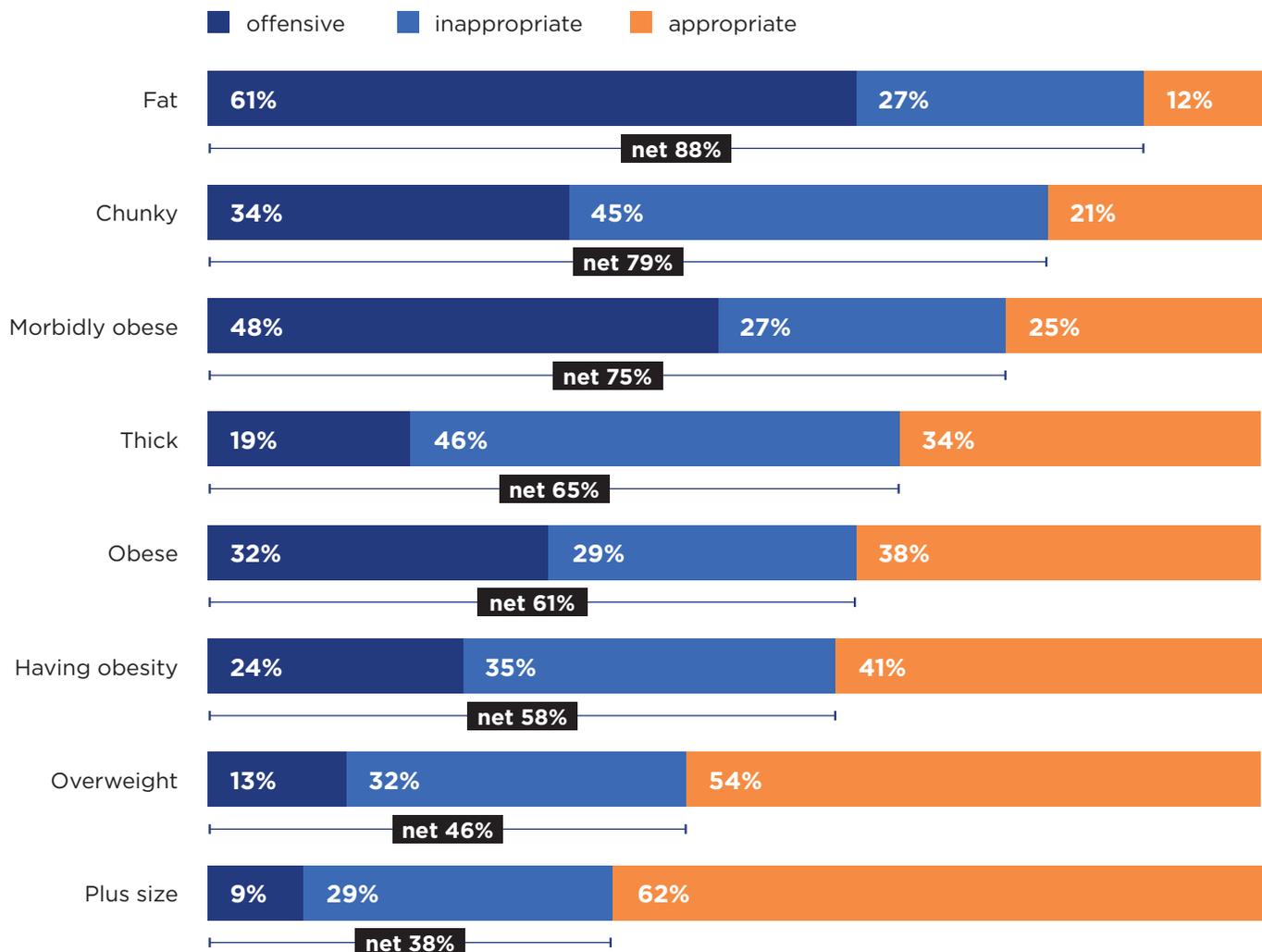
### How do the news media show images of people with higher body weight?



Terminology matters, too. Given eight terms that might be used to describe people with higher body weight, majorities see six as either inappropriate or offensive. Topping the list is “fat,” a term seen as offensive or inappropriate by 88 percent of people with higher body weight. Most acceptable are “plus size,” seen

as appropriate by 62 percent, and “overweight,” appropriate to 54 percent. Health care professionals recommend person-first language when talking to or about people living with obesity in a medical context, describing what that person “has” rather than what that person “is.”

**% calling each term offensive, inappropriate or appropriate**



Looking toward solutions, an open-ended question invited respondents to say how they would change the way people with higher body weight are portrayed in TV shows or movies. Most by far urged a rethink of the nature of representations: They would show people with higher body weight in ways similar to people of lower body weight, avoid negative stereotypes, allow characters to be seen as attractive regardless of their weight and remove the focus on body weight altogether.

## Personal experiences

In addition to media portrayals, the survey, produced for the Media Empathy Foundation by [Langer Research Associates](#), delved into some personal experiences of people with higher body weight. Among those results:

- Sixty-five percent say they've been teased or treated unfairly because of their weight.
- Nearly half, 47 percent, say they themselves have at least some negative feelings about people with higher body weight.
- Fifty-three percent say they often or sometimes direct negative feelings at themselves because of their weight. An additional 24 percent do so occasionally.
- As noted, gender and age gaps are striking. Women with higher body weight are 13 percentage points more likely than men to have been teased or treated unfairly because of their weight, and a wide 22 points more likely to often or sometimes be self-critical because of it. Such experiences also are much higher among people age 18-35 than among older adults.

## Health impacts

In another area, the survey both underscores health challenges associated with having a higher body weight and measures awareness of some risk areas.

The study, again, was conducted among people who report a height and weight that corresponds with a BMI of 30 or higher, the level for having obesity as defined by the CDC. The CDC reports, "People who have obesity, compared to those with a healthy weight, are at increased risk for many serious diseases and health conditions."<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, just 23 percent of people with higher body weight in this survey report that their health is excellent or very good. That's half what it is in the general public – 47 percent in a Harvard School of Public Health/National Public Radio survey last year. Instead 30 percent of people with a BMI of 30 to less than 40 say their health is only fair or poor, rising to 45 percent of those with a BMI of 40 or higher – compared with just 17 percent of all adults nationally.

Roughly two-thirds of people with higher body weight say that obesity substantially increases the risk of diabetes, heart disease and high blood pressure; majorities also think it increases the risk of high cholesterol and stroke "a lot." Fewer, about a quarter, say so about the risk of mental health conditions and 15 percent, the risk of cancer.

The survey was conducted July 25-Aug. 14, 2023, in English and Spanish, among a random sample of 1,240 adults with a BMI of 30 or higher, via the probability-based SSRS Opinion Panel, in which participants are recruited via address-based sampling to take surveys online or by telephone. Results have an overall margin of sampling error of plus or minus 2.9 percentage points; error margins are larger for subgroups.<sup>3</sup> This study was made possible thanks to the support of healthcare company Novo Nordisk Inc.

Detailed findings are presented in the full report that follows.

<sup>2</sup> See <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/basics/consequences.html>

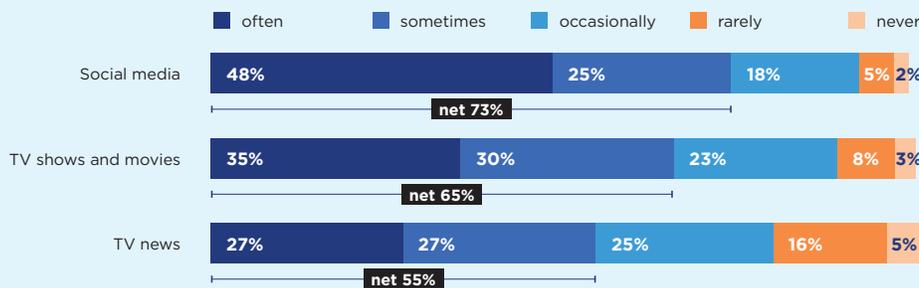
<sup>3</sup> All differences described in this report have been tested for statistical significance. Those that are significant at the 95 percent confidence level (or higher) are reported without qualification. Those that are significant at 90-94 percent confidence are described as "slight" differences. Those that are significant at less than 90 percent confidence are not reported as differences.

# 01

## Evaluating TV Shows and Movies

Majorities of people with higher body weight think social media (73 percent), TV shows and movies (65 percent) and TV news (55 percent) often or sometimes reinforce negative stereotypes about people with higher body weight. Few – in the single digits – say this never happens.

### How often do the media reinforce negative stereotypes about people with higher body weight?



Seventy-two percent of women with higher body weight say TV shows and movies often or sometimes reinforce negative stereotypes.

Women and younger adults are especially apt to hold these views. Seventy-two percent of women with higher body weight say TV shows and movies often or sometimes reinforce negative stereotypes, compared with 56 percent of men. And it's 75 percent among 18- to 35-year-olds, declining to 55 percent among those age 65+.<sup>4</sup> Combining groups, this view reaches 81 percent among women age 18-35, compared with 65 percent of men in that age group.

Personal experience also is a factor. The perception that TV shows and movies more often reinforce negative stereotypes is much more prevalent among people who've been teased or treated unfairly because of their weight, as well as among those who are more self-critical about it.

<sup>4</sup> Results on TV news and social media are explored in separate sections.

**% who say TV shows and movies often or sometimes reinforce negative stereotypes**

**All - 65%**

Women  
**72%**

Men  
**56%**

Age 18-35  
**75%**

Age 65+  
**55%**

Been teased/  
mistreated  
**71%**

Not teased/  
mistreated  
**52%**

More self-critical  
about their weight  
**73%**

Less self-critical  
about their weight  
**51%**

In another measure, even more people - nearly nine in 10 - say they see at least some negative messages about people with higher body weight on TV shows or in movies. This includes 64 percent who see mixed messages, some positive and some negative; and 24 percent who say TV shows and movies mainly reinforce negative stereotypes. Only 12 percent say TV shows and movies mainly avoid such stereotypes.

Women and men look similar on this gauge, but personal experience again is a factor. People who've been teased or mistreated are more apt than others to say TV shows and movies mainly reinforce negative stereotypes, 29 vs. 14 percent. The same holds true for those who more often direct negative feelings toward themselves because of their weight.

**Media exclusion**

Which roles TV or movie actors receive is another challenge. Seventy-nine percent think the TV shows or movies they see tend to exclude people with higher body weight from leading roles. Among people who say so, eight in 10 say that this sends a negative message about people with higher body weight.

While the perception of exclusion is broadly held across groups, there are some differences in saying that this happens and sends a negative message. Again it's higher among women than men, 68 vs. 57 percent. The gender gap is widest among younger adults: 73 percent of women age 18-35 both see exclusion and say it sends a negative message, compared with 56 percent of men that age.

**How do the TV shows and movies you see mainly portray people with higher body weight?**



In ways that send mixed messages



In ways that reinforce negative stereotypes

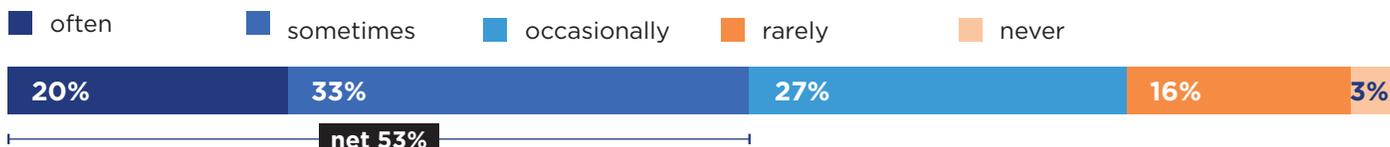


In ways that avoid negative stereotypes

## Portrayals as body shaming

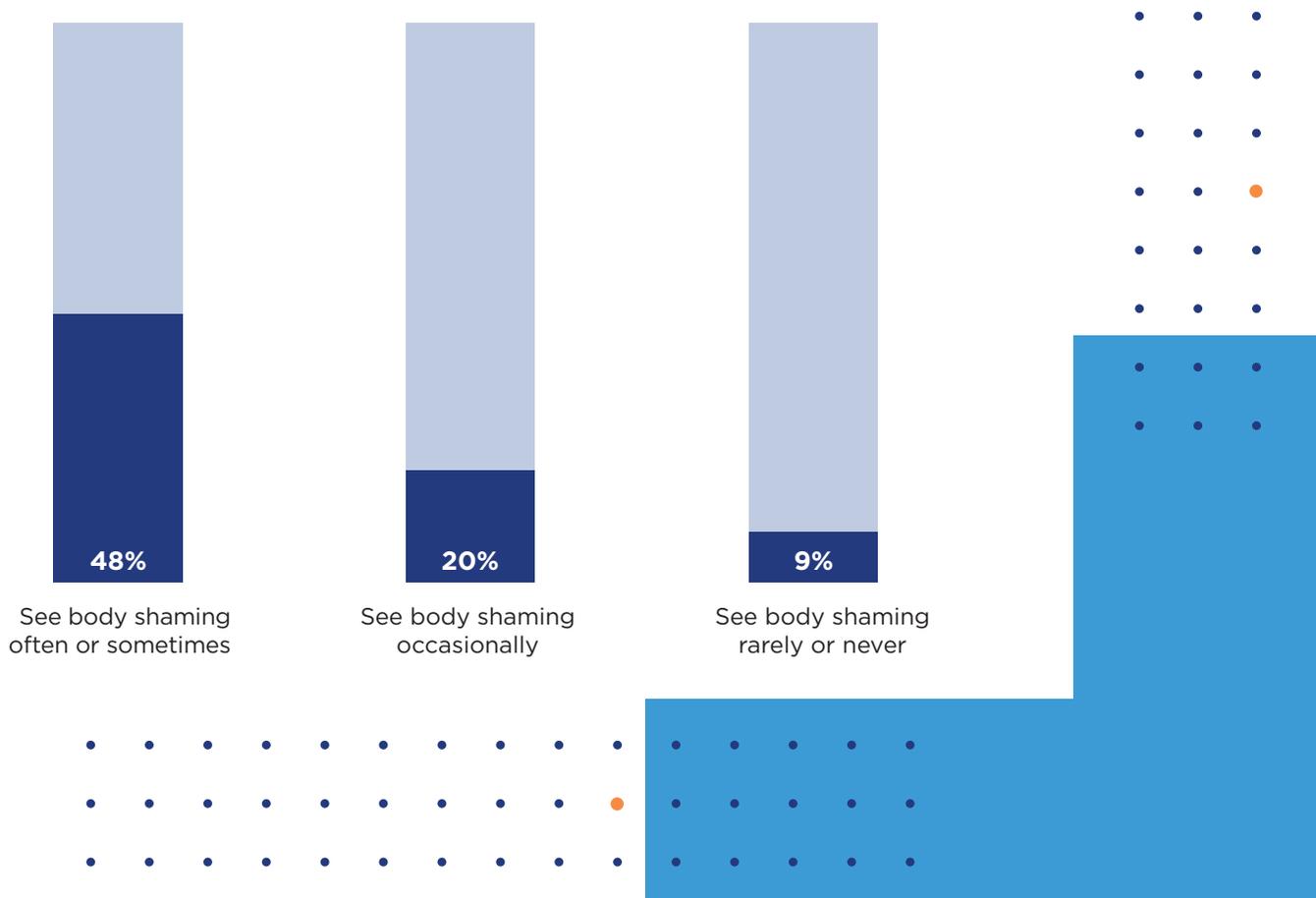
In another troubling result, 53 percent of people with higher body weight say the TV shows and movies they see often or sometimes engage in body shaming, defined in the survey as subjecting someone to criticism or humiliation for their body shape and size, whether directly or indirectly. An additional 27 percent say they see this occasionally. Sixteen percent say it rarely happens; 3 percent, never.

### Feel that the TV shows and movies they see engage in body shaming



This is associated with a sense of disrespect. Among those who perceive more frequent body shaming, 48 percent also often or sometimes feel personally disrespected by portrayals of people with higher body weight on TV shows and in movies. That drops to 20 percent of those who report occasional body shaming and 9 percent of those who see it rarely or never.

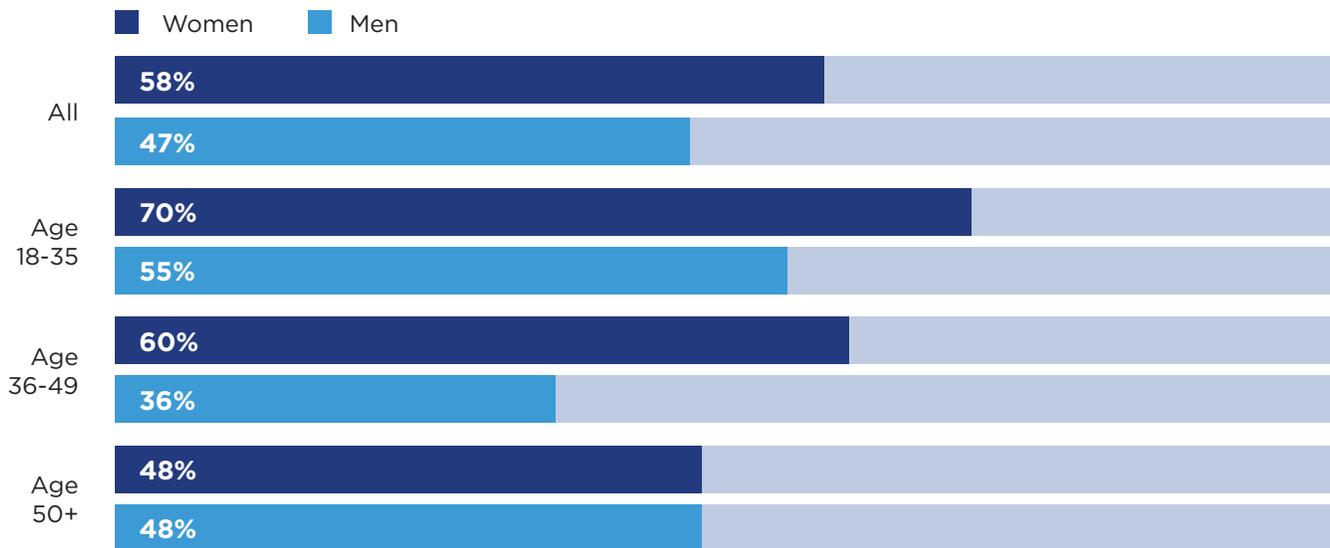
### Have often or sometimes felt disrespected by TV show and movie portrayals of people with higher body weight



Women again are more attuned to this issue: Fifty-eight percent often or sometimes see body shaming on TV shows and in movies, compared with 47 percent of men. That gap is especially wide among middle-aged women compared with middle-aged men: Sixty percent of women age 36-49 say body shaming often or sometimes occurs, vs. 36 percent of men that age.

**% saying the TV shows and movies they see often or sometimes engage in body shaming**

**All - 53%**



Other patterns hold: Those who personally have been teased or treated unfairly because of their weight are more likely than others to see body shaming on screen at least sometimes, 60 vs. 41 percent. And it's 64 percent among those who more often direct negative feelings at themselves because of their weight, vs. 38 percent among those who rarely or never do this.

Perceptions of body shaming overlap with evaluations of TV shows and movies as reinforcing negative stereotypes. Among those who see body shaming more often, 82 percent also say TV shows and movies often or sometimes reinforce negative stereotypes. This drops to 52 percent of those who see body shaming just occasionally and 34 percent who rarely or never see it. People who more frequently see body shaming also are much more apt than others to say TV shows and movies mainly reinforce negative stereotypes, as opposed to sending mixed or mainly positive messages.

**Encouraging a positive body image**

In a question testing a positive attribute of TV and movie content on this topic, 39 percent overall say the shows and movies they see often or sometimes encourage people to have a positive body image no matter what their weight. But about as many, 36 percent, say this happens just occasionally, as well as a quarter who see it rarely or never.

Media consumption is associated with this result. Among those who report using various types of media most often (an average of 15+ hours a day, 18 percent of the population), 48 percent see a positive body image encouraged at least sometimes. That drops to 38 percent among those who consume 4-14 hours of media per day and 26 percent of those who consume 0-3 hours daily.

## Negative portrayals

Majorities overall say the TV shows and movies they see often or sometimes portray people with higher body weight in specific negative ways:

- As the target of jokes, for comic relief (63 percent)
- As unattractive (63 percent)
- As lazy or unmotivated (60 percent)
- In ways that make fun of their body size or weight (56 percent)
- In storylines that focus on their appearance (55 percent)
- As sloppy or disorganized (54 percent)

This falls off sharply on the harshest item, asking if people with higher body weight are portrayed as evil or cruel. Twenty-three percent say they see that often or sometimes.

Majorities overall say the TV shows and movies they see often or sometimes portray people with higher body weight in specific negative ways.

### How often do the TV shows and movies you see portray people with higher body weight in these ways?

	Often/sometimes	Occasionally	Rarely/never
As the target of jokes, for comic relief	63%	24%	12%
As unattractive	63%	22%	14%
As lazy or unmotivated	60%	23%	17%
Making fun of their body size or weight	56%	25%	18%
In storylines that focus on their appearance	55%	25%	19%
As sloppy or disorganized	54%	27%	19%
As evil or cruel	23%	26%	50%

On the flip side, just 38 percent say people with higher body weight are often or sometimes portrayed in a way that is not defined by their body size.

Age is a factor, with younger adults more likely than others to report these portrayals in the TV shows and movies they see and seniors least likely to do so. In the widest gap, 74 percent of those age 18-35 often or sometimes see TV shows and movies make fun of the body size or weight of people with higher body weight; just half as many seniors, 37 percent, say the same.

**TV shows and movies often or sometimes portray people with higher body weight...**

	Age			
	18-35	36-49	50-64	65+
As the target of jokes, for comic relief	77%	63%	61%	47%
As unattractive	75%	65%	57%	52%
Making fun of their body size or weight	74%	54%	55%	37%
As lazy or unmotivated	72%	64%	56%	43%
In storylines that focus on their appearance	68%	55%	51%	40%
As sloppy or disorganized	67%	54%	51%	39%
As evil or cruel	29%	26%	19%	16%

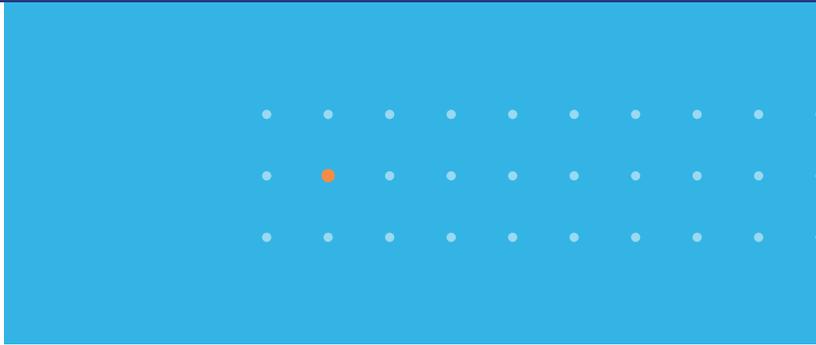
Differences between women and men are smaller than in some other results. Still, women are at least slightly more apt than men to see frequent negative portrayals on all items except portraying people with higher body weight as sloppy or disorganized. In the widest gap, 62 percent of women, vs. 46 percent of men, see people with higher body weight often or sometimes shown in storylines that focus on their appearance.

Women age 18-35 are especially likely to report frequent portrayals. They're more apt than men their age to say they often or sometimes see people with higher body weight depicted as the target of jokes (84 vs. 65 percent), as lazy or unmotivated (76 vs. 63 percent), in storylines that focus on their appearance (73 vs. 61 percent) and as unattractive (80 vs. 69 percent).

**TV shows and movies often or sometimes portray people with higher body weight...**

	Age 18-35	
	Women	Men
As the target of jokes, for comic relief	84%	65%
As unattractive	80%	69%
Making fun of their body size or weight	77%	68%
As lazy or unmotivated	76%	63%
In storylines that focus on their appearance	73%	61%
As sloppy or disorganized	70%	63%
As evil or cruel	32%	22%

Personal experiences also are a factor. Across the items tested, people who often or sometimes are self-critical because of their weight and those who have been teased or treated unfairly because of their weight are more apt than others to report frequent negative portrayals of people with higher body weight in TV shows and movies.

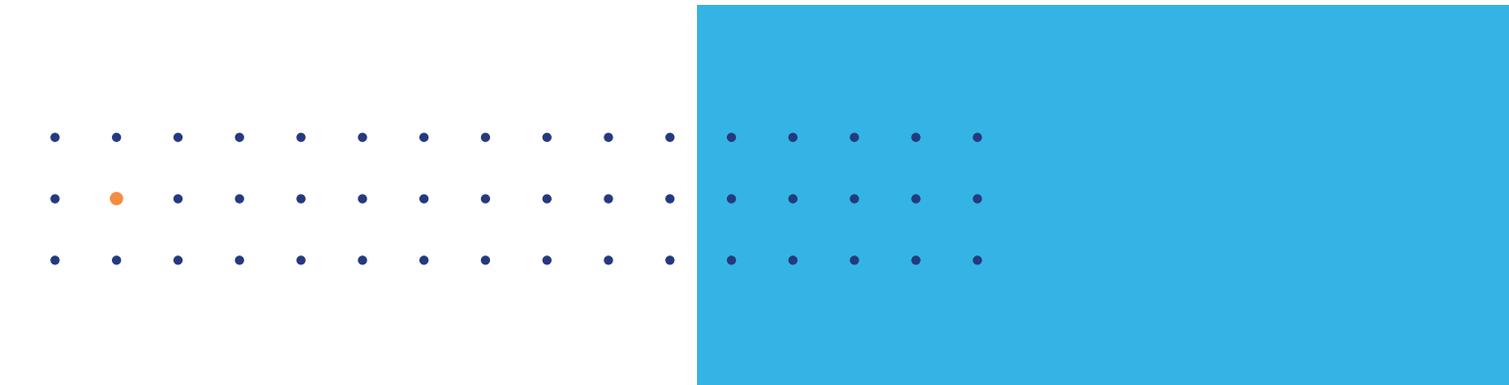


**TV shows and movies often or sometimes portray people with higher body weight...**

	Direct negative feelings at oneself because of one's weight			Teased or treated unfairly because of one's weight	
	Often or sometimes	Occasionally	Rarely or never	Yes	No
As the target of jokes, for comic relief	73%	56%	48%	70%	51%
As unattractive	73%	53%	48%	70%	49%
Making fun of their body size or weight	68%	45%	41%	65%	39%
As lazy or unmotivated	73%	48%	43%	68%	44%
In storylines that focus on their appearance	66%	46%	39%	61%	43%
As sloppy or disorganized	63%	45%	41%	63%	37%
As evil or cruel	29%	18%	15%	28%	14%

In one example, 73 percent of those who are more often self-critical of their weight, and 70 percent of those who have been teased or mistreated, see people with higher body weight often or sometimes portrayed as the target of jokes. That falls to about half of those who are rarely or never self-critical, and similarly to about half of those who haven't been teased or mistreated.

Sizable differences among these groups do not carry over to the more positive item about the media portraying people with higher body weight in a way that is not defined by their size. Thirty-five to 45 percent across the teased/treated unfairly and more self-critical groups say that they often or sometimes see this in TV shows or movies.



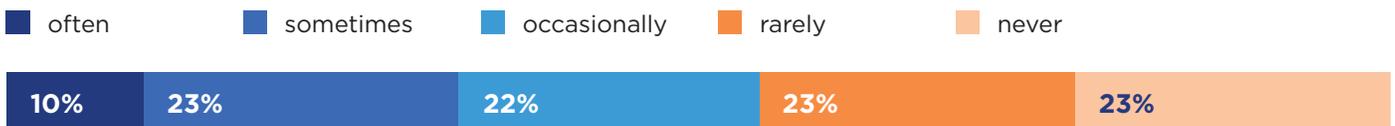
# 02

## Impacts of Media Stigma

### Feeling disrespected

A third of people with higher body weight say they often or sometimes have felt disrespected by the way people with higher body weight are portrayed on TV shows and in movies. An additional 22 percent say this has happened occasionally. Twenty-three percent say it's occurred, but rarely; an additional 23 percent, never.

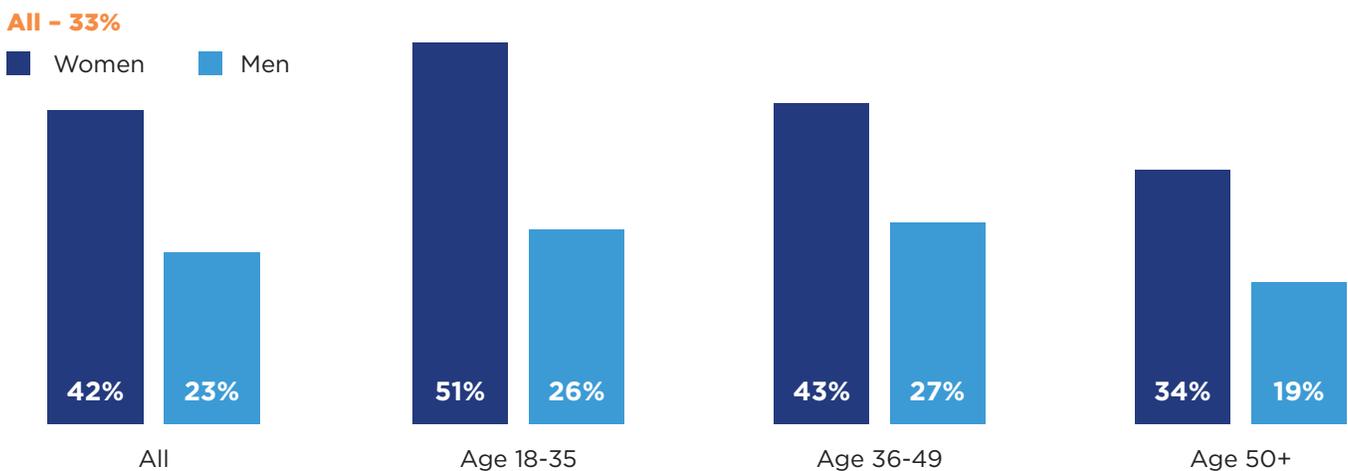
#### Have felt disrespected by TV show and movie portrayals of people with higher body weight



Feeling disrespected peaks among some of the same groups previously identified as more attuned to the issue: Women, younger women, people who've been teased or treated unfairly on the basis of their weight and those who more frequently direct negative feelings toward themselves because of their weight.

Forty-two percent of women say portrayals of people with higher body weight on TV shows and in movies often or sometimes have made them personally feel disrespected, compared with 23 percent of men. It's 51 percent among 18- to 35-year-old women, essentially double the level among men that age.

#### Have often or sometimes felt disrespected by TV show and movie portrayals of people with higher body weight



Forty-three percent of those who've been teased or treated unfairly because of their weight have felt disrespected by such portrayals, compared with 15 percent of those who haven't been teased or treated unfairly. And it's 49 percent among those who often direct negative feelings at themselves because of their weight, dropping to 15 percent of those who rarely or never do so.

Among other differences, people with BMIs 40 or greater are 17 points more apt than those with BMIs from 30 to less than 40 to say they've often or sometimes felt disrespected by TV and movie portrayals of people with higher body weight, 46 vs. 29 percent. And Black and Hispanic people are more likely to say this, at about four in 10 alike, compared with 29 percent of white people.

### Have often or sometimes felt disrespected by TV show and movie portrayals of people with higher body weight

People who have been teased or treated unfairly because of their weight



People who have not been teased or treated unfairly because of their weight



People who often direct negative feelings at themselves because of their weight



People who sometimes direct negative feelings at themselves because of their weight



People who occasionally direct negative feelings at themselves because of their weight



People who rarely or never direct negative feelings at themselves because of their weight



Adults with a BMI of 40+



Adults with a BMI of 30 to <40



Hispanic people



Black people



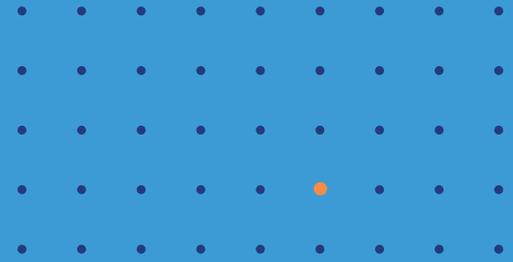
White people



### Specific effects

On specific items, 36 percent say TV show and movie portrayals of people with higher body weight have had a negative effect on their own body image, 33 percent on their self-esteem and 26 percent on their overall mental health. Each surpasses the number reporting positive effects on these, although many more people in each case report no effects.

More report positive than negative effects on three other items – their efforts to have a healthy lifestyle, their likelihood to get needed health or medical care and their likelihood to get mental health care they may need. Fifty-four to 66 percent report no effect on these.



### Personal impacts of TV show and movie portrayals of people with higher body weight

#### More negative than positive

	Positive	Negative	No effect
Your body image	16%	36%	47%
Your self-esteem	17%	33%	49%
Your mental health overall	17%	26%	56%

#### More positive than negative

	Positive	Negative	No effect
Your efforts to have a healthy lifestyle	29%	16%	54%
Your likelihood to get the health or medical care you need	28%	12%	60%
Your likelihood to get the mental health care you may need	23%	11%	66%



Women are more apt than men to report negative effects in each area. Forty-three percent of women say their body image has been negatively affected by portrayals of people with higher body weight on TV shows or in movies, compared with 28 percent of men. Forty percent of women say the same about their self-esteem, 32 percent about their mental health overall.

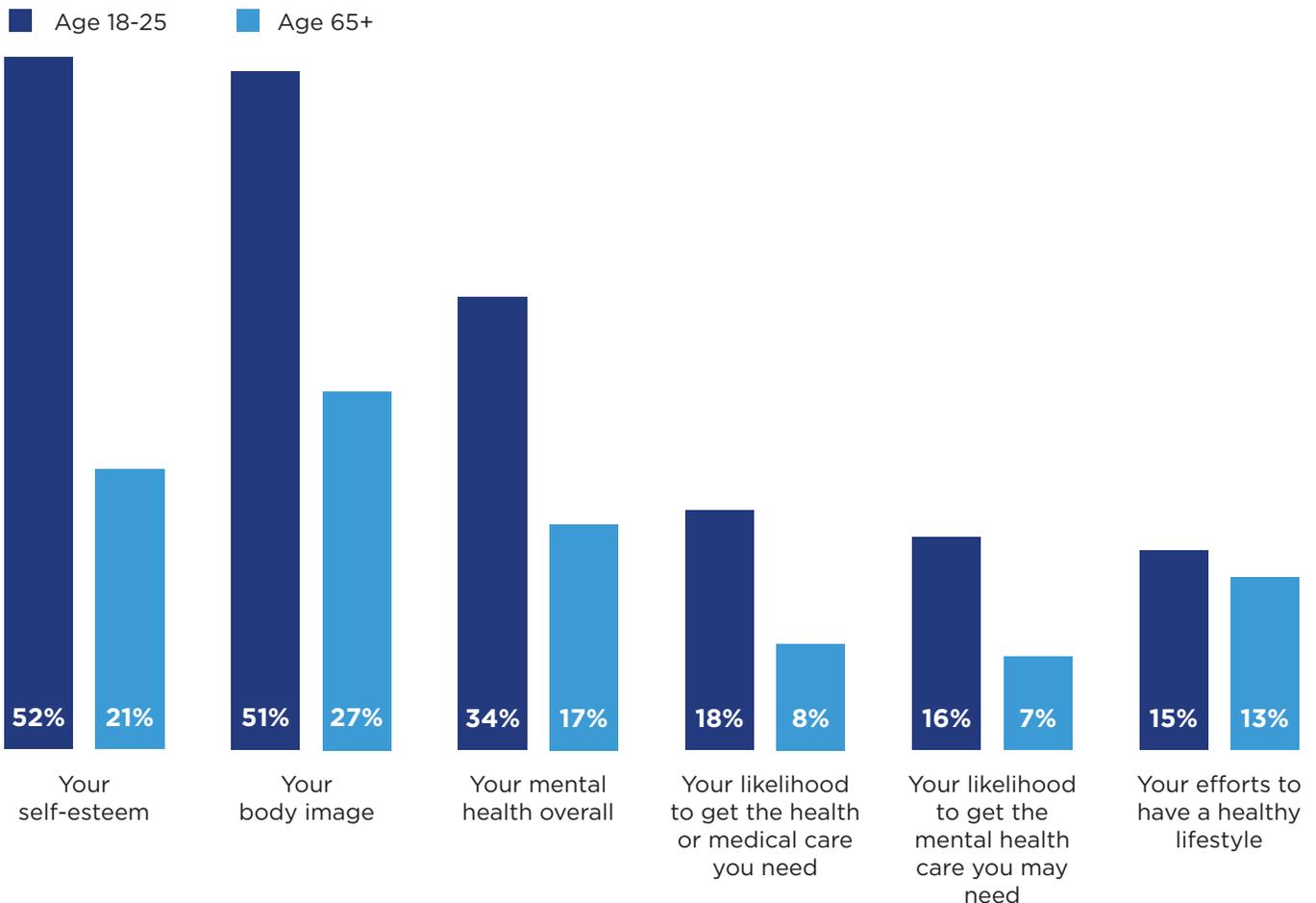
Men are not any more likely than women to cite positive effects. Instead, they are more likely to report being unaffected by media portrayals of people with higher body weight, on all but the likelihood of getting needed medical care. (Women, actually, are 6 points more likely than men to say there’s been a positive effect on their likelihood to get the mental health care they may need, 25 vs. 19 percent, and a slight 4 points on their mental health overall, 19 vs. 15 percent.)

### Negative impacts of TV show and movie portrayals of people with higher body weight

	Women	Men
Your body image	43%	28%
Your self-esteem	40%	24%
Your mental health overall	32%	19%
Your efforts to have a healthy lifestyle	20%	11%
Your likelihood to get the health or medical care you need	14%	9%
Your likelihood to get the mental health care you may need	13%	7%

Among other demographic differences, 18- to 25-year-olds are more apt than those 65 and older to report negative effects on their self-esteem (52 vs. 21 percent), body image (51 vs. 27 percent), mental health overall (34 vs. 17 percent), likelihood to get the health or medical care they need (18 vs. 8 percent) and likelihood to get the mental health care they may need (16 vs. 7 percent).

### Negative impacts of TV show and movie portrayals of people with higher body weight

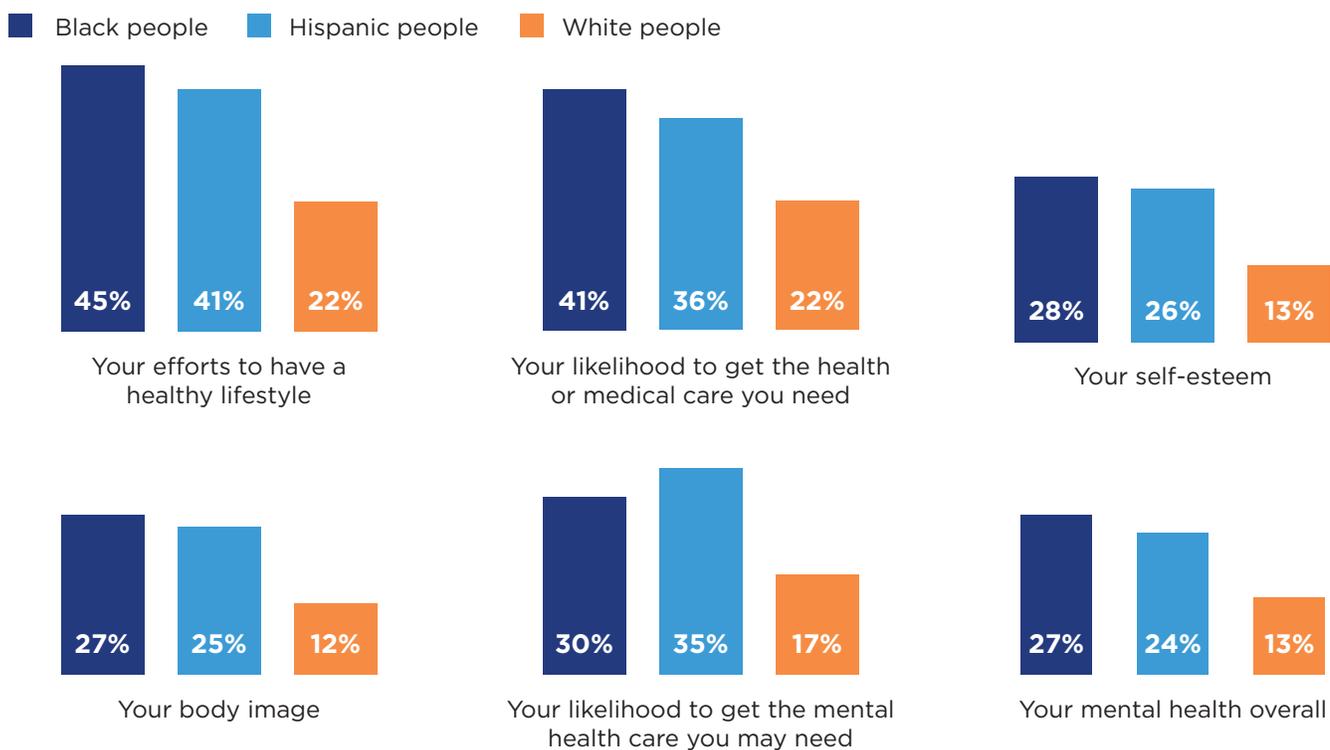


At the same time, the youngest adults are more apt to report positive effects on their efforts to have a healthy lifestyle. Four in 10 of those age 18-25 report a positive effect on such efforts, compared with a quarter of those 50 and up. The youngest adults also are slightly more apt to report positive effects on the likelihood of getting the mental health care they may need, 26 vs. 19 percent of those 50 and older.

Looking at both age and gender, younger women are especially likely to say they've experienced negative effects on their body image (52 percent), self-esteem (51 percent) and mental health overall (42 percent).

Another difference occurs by race and ethnicity: Black and Hispanic people are 11 to 23 points more likely than white people to cite positive effects on each of the six items tested.

### Positive impacts of TV show and movie portrayals of people with higher body weight



Among other groups, those who've been teased or treated unfairly because of their weight are 12 to a wide 34 points more likely than others to say that they've been negatively affected by portrayals of people with higher body weight on TV shows or in movies.

Negative effects again also are much higher among those who say they often or sometimes direct negative feelings at themselves because of their weight. Roughly half in this group say their own body image (53 percent) and self-esteem (50 percent) have been negatively affected, compared with 21 and 22 percent of those who occasionally self-direct negative feelings and 12 and 7 percent of those who do so rarely or never.

### Negative impacts of TV show and movie portrayals of people with higher body weight

	Direct negative feelings at oneself because of one's weight			Teased or treated unfairly because of one's weight	
	Often or sometimes	Occasionally	Rarely or never	Yes	No
Your body image	53%	21%	12%	47%	16%
Your self-esteem	50%	22%	7%	45%	11%
Your mental health overall	39%	17%	7%	36%	8%
Your efforts to have a healthy lifestyle	24%	8%	5%	22%	5%
Your likelihood to get the health or medical care you need	18%	7%	4%	17%	4%
Your likelihood to get the mental health care you may need	17%	5%	3%	15%	3%

Cut the other way, among those who say their body image has been negatively impacted, 78 percent say they often or sometimes direct negative feelings at themselves because of their weight. This compares with 47 percent of those who cite a positive effect and 36 percent among those who cite no effect.

There's a relationship between negative effects and media perceptions, as well. Among those who say TV shows and movies often or sometimes engage in body shaming, 50 percent report a negative effect on their body image, 47 percent on their self-esteem and 37 percent on their mental health overall. Those shares drop to 19 to 27 percent among those who say TV shows and movies engage in body shaming, but only occasionally, and 8 to 10 percent of those who say they rarely or never do.

### Negative impacts of TV show and movie portrayals of people with higher body weight

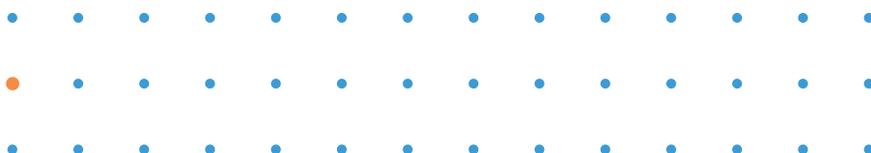
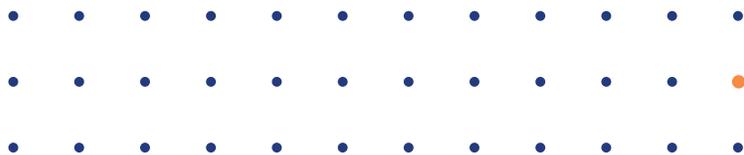
	TV shows and movies engage in body-shaming		
	Often or sometimes	Occasionally	Rarely or never
Your body image	50%	27%	10%
Your self-esteem	47%	22%	10%
Your mental health overall	37%	19%	8%
Your efforts to have a healthy lifestyle	23%	10%	5%
Your likelihood to get the health or medical care you need	17%	8%	4%
Your likelihood to get the mental health care you may need	16%	7%	2%

# Those on the higher end of TV show or movie consumption are more apt to report positive effects.

Those on the higher end of TV show or movie consumption are more apt to report positive effects. In an example, a quarter of those who watch 5+ hours of TV shows or movies per day say portrayals of people with higher body weight on TV shows or movies have had a positive effect on their self-esteem, compared with 11 percent of those who watch 0-1 hours per day.

## Positive impacts of TV show and movie portrayals of people with higher body weight

	Time watching TV shows or movies daily		
	0-1 hours	2-4 hours	5+ hours
Your likelihood to get the health or medical care you need	21%	26%	37%
Your efforts to have a healthy lifestyle	20%	30%	33%
Your likelihood to get the mental health care you may need	15%	22%	28%
Your self-esteem	11%	16%	25%
Your body image	11%	16%	22%
Your mental health overall	10%	15%	26%



# 03

## Self-criticism, Teasing and Unfair Treatment

As is clear in these results, societal pressures regarding weight are more prevalent among women and younger adults.

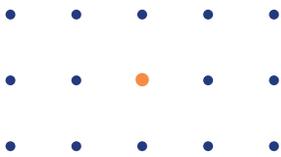
Overall, 53 percent of people with higher body weight say they often or sometimes direct negative feelings at themselves because of their weight. The gender gap is wide: Sixty-three percent of women with higher body weight report doing this, compared with 41 percent of men.

Similarly, 64 percent of those age 18-35 often or sometimes direct negative feelings toward themselves because of their weight, dropping to 49 percent of those age 50-64 and 38 percent of those 65 and older.

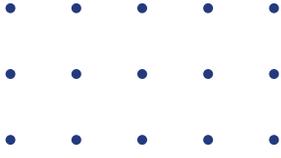
There are gaps, too, in having been teased or treated unfairly because of one's weight. Overall, 65 percent of people with higher body weight say this has occurred to them - 71 percent of women, vs. 58 percent of men; and 82 percent among 18- to 35-year-olds, compared with 50 percent among those 65 and older.

Experiences of being teased or treated unfairly are similar among younger men and women, with a gender gap emerging in later years. Self-criticism, by contrast, is higher among women than men across age groups.

In another demographic difference, both white (56 percent) and Hispanic (54 percent) people with higher body weight are more apt than Black people (42 percent) to be self-critical about their weight often or sometimes.



	Often or sometimes self-critical about your weight	Teased or treated unfairly
<b>All</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>65%</b>
Women	63%	71%
Men	41%	58%
Age 18-35	64%	82%
36-49	57%	67%
50-64	49%	57%
65+	38%	50%
Women 18-35	69%	84%
Men 18-35	54%	80%
Women 36-49	63%	71%
Men 36-49	49%	60%
Women 50+	58%	61%
Men 50+	34%	49%



# 04

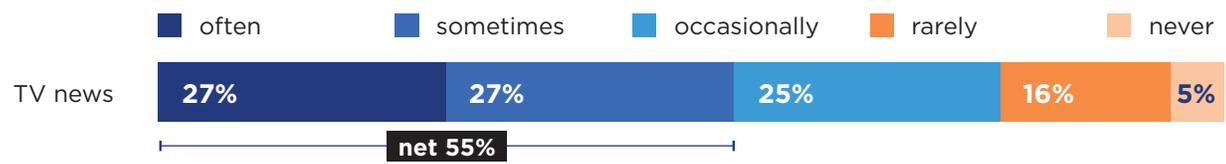


## Perceptions of News Media and Health News

While this study focuses chiefly on views of TV shows and movies, perceptions of the news media’s portrayal of people with higher body weight also skew negative.

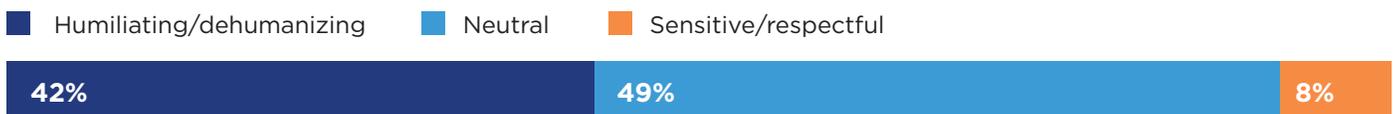
Fifty-five percent of people with higher body weight say the TV news media often or sometimes portray people with higher body weight in ways that reinforce negative stereotypes.

### How often do the media reinforce negative stereotypes about people with higher body weight?



They’re far likelier to say the news media show images of people with higher body weight in ways that are humiliating or dehumanizing (42 percent) than sensitive or respectful (8 percent). Forty-nine percent see such portrayals as neutral.

### How do the news media show images of people with higher body weight?



Seven in 10 adults with higher body weight feel that obesity tends to be covered in ways that blame people for their body weight. And 79 percent say health news reports tend to suggest that all people with higher body weight are unhealthy.

As elsewhere, gender and age gaps emerge. Women are 15 points more apt than men to say the news media's images portray people with higher body weight in ways that are humiliating or dehumanizing, 49 vs. 34 percent. Fifty-five percent of those age 18-35 say the same, dropping to 41 percent of 36- to 64-year-olds and 28 percent of those 65 and older. And this perception peaks, at 63 percent, among women 35 or younger.

**Health news reports...**



Tend to cover obesity in a way that blames people for their body weight



Tend to suggest that all people with higher body weight are unhealthy

**% seeing news images of people with higher body weight as dehumanizing or humiliating**

**All - 42%**

Women	Men	Age 18-35	Age 36-64	Age 65+	Women Age 18-35	Men Age 18-35
<b>49%</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>63%</b>	<b>40%</b>

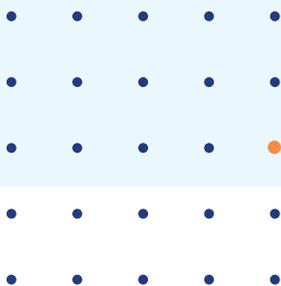
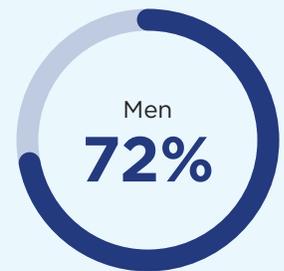
**% who feel that obesity tends to be covered in health news reports in ways that blame people for their body weight**

**All - 70%**

Women	Men	Age 18-35	Age 36-64	Age 65+	Women Age 18-35	Men Age 18-35
<b>78%</b>	<b>62%</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>86%</b>	<b>64%</b>

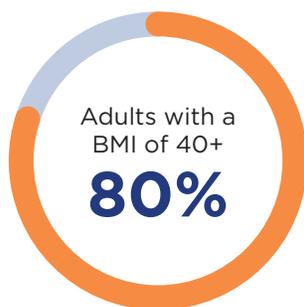
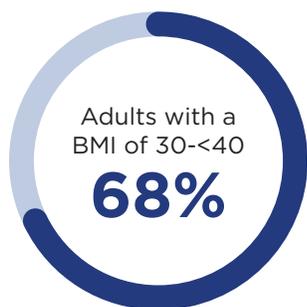
Similarly, women and young adults are more apt than their counterparts to say health news reports tend to cover obesity in ways that blame people for their body weight. Women also are more apt than men to say such reports tend to suggest that all people with higher body weight are unhealthy, 84 vs. 72 percent.

**% who feel that health news reports tend to suggest that all people with higher body weight are unhealthy**

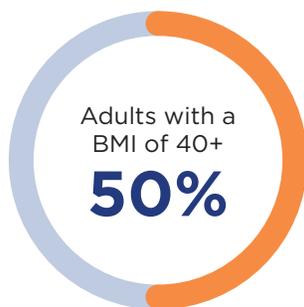
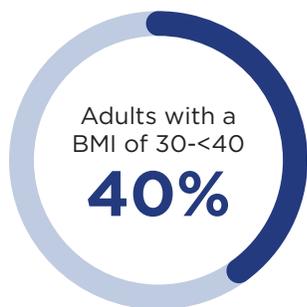


Views of the news media blaming people for their body weight and showing images that are humiliating or dehumanizing are more common among frequent social media users, in part because they're younger and more apt to be women. Negative views also are more common among people with a higher BMI. In one example, 80 percent of people with a BMI of 40 or greater say health news reports tend to blame people for their higher body weight, compared with 68 percent among those with a BMI of 30 to less than 40.

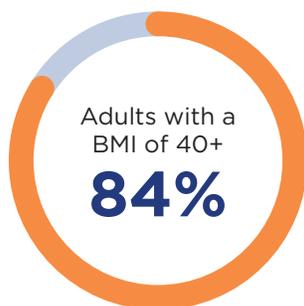
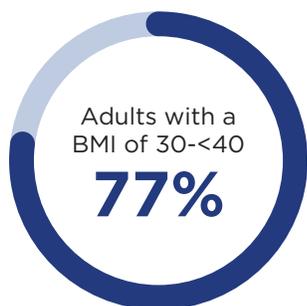
**Obesity tends to be covered in health news reports in ways that blame people for their body weight**



**Overall, news images of people with higher body weight are humiliating or dehumanizing**



**Health news reports tend to suggest that all people with higher body weight are unhealthy**



Views of the news media blaming people for their body weight and showing images that are humiliating or dehumanizing are more common among people with a higher BMI.

These views, as others, also are associated with personal experience. People who have been teased or treated unfairly because of their weight are 30 points more likely than those who have not had these experiences to view images of people with higher body weight in the news as humiliating or dehumanizing, 53 vs. 23 percent. And it's 62 percent among people who often direct negative feelings at themselves because of their weight, compared with 46 percent of those who do this sometimes, 32 percent of those who do it occasionally and 24 percent of those who do it rarely or never.

### **% seeing news images of people with higher body weight as humiliating or dehumanizing**

People who have been teased or treated unfairly because of their weight



People who have not been teased or treated unfairly because of their weight



People who often direct negative feelings at themselves because of their weight



People who sometimes direct negative feelings at themselves because of their weight



People who occasionally direct negative feelings at themselves because of their weight



People who rarely or never direct negative feelings at themselves because of their weight



## Coverage of specific topics

Attitudes are mixed when it comes to the amount of coverage given to specific obesity-related topics. Pluralities say news coverage is “about right” for the link between obesity and heart disease (42 percent), the link between obesity and diabetes (41 percent) and the potential health consequences of having obesity (38 percent). The rest in each case divide between thinking these topics are covered too little or too much.

People divide roughly into thirds on the amount of coverage of medical treatment for obesity, the body positivity movement and the causes of obesity. They’re least satisfied with the amount of health news coverage on the link between obesity and mental health, with only 27 percent saying it’s about right. Still, there’s no consensus on how much coverage is warranted: Thirty-seven percent think this is covered too little, 36 percent, too much.

## Health news coverage

	Too much	Too little	About the right amount
The link between obesity and heart disease	28%	29%	42%
The link between obesity and diabetes	27%	30%	41%
Potential health consequences of having obesity	30%	31%	38%
Medical treatment for obesity	33%	34%	33%
The “body positivity” movement	35%	31%	33%
The causes of obesity	34%	34%	31%
The link between obesity and mental health conditions	36%	37%	27%

# 05

## Social Media

Social media are especially widely perceived to reinforce negative stereotypes of people with higher body weight, with 73 percent saying this happens often or sometimes - more than say the same for TV shows and movies (65 percent) and TV news (55 percent).

As in other cases, this view is more prevalent among women than men, 81 vs. 65 percent; and among those age 18-35 than among people 65 or older, 82 vs. 64 percent. It's also higher among those who report using social media more than an hour per day.

### % who say social media often or sometimes reinforce negative stereotypes of people with higher body weight

All - 73%



Among those who report using social media, on average, four or more hours a day, 62 percent say they often or sometimes direct negative feelings at themselves because of their body weight. This compares with 51 percent who use social media an average of one to

three hours per day and 42 percent of those who do not typically use it. (There is no such relationship for time spent watching TV shows and movies.) That, at least in part, reflects heavier social media use by women and younger adults.

### % who often or sometimes direct negative feelings at themselves because of their body weight

All - 53%

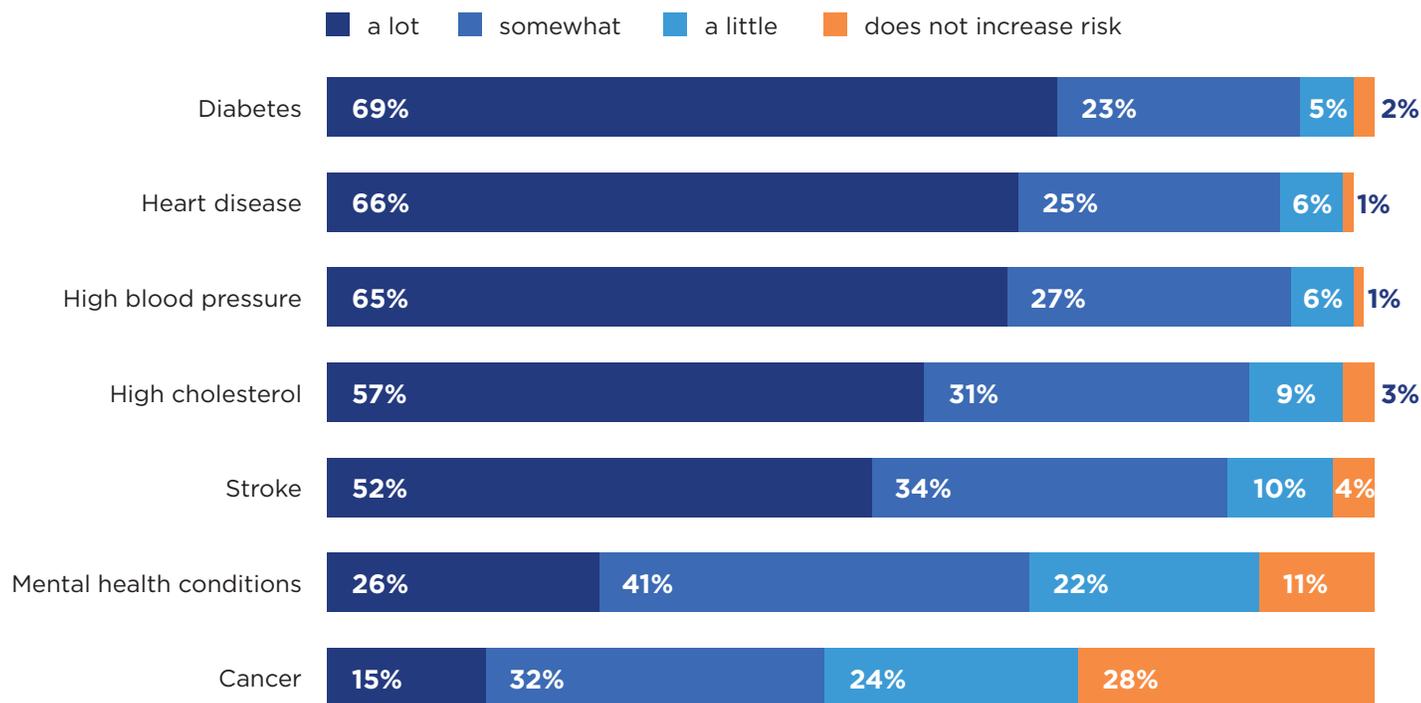


# 06

## Risk Perceptions

Most people with higher body weight see obesity as increasing risks for various health conditions. Thinking it raises risk “a lot” peaks for diabetes (69 percent), heart disease (66 percent), high blood pressure (65 percent) and high cholesterol (57 percent). Fifty-two percent say the same of stroke. The rest see higher risk, albeit not at that level; indeed, for five out of seven conditions tested, fewer than 5 percent see no increased risk because of obesity.

### Does obesity increase a person’s risk of developing each of the following, or not?



Two items rate comparatively low: Twenty-six percent think obesity does a lot to increase the risk of mental health conditions and 15 percent say it does a lot to increase the risk of cancer. To be sure, majorities still see higher risk of each, if not a lot higher. Eleven and 28 percent, respectively, think obesity does not increase the risk of mental health conditions and cancer at all.

Those who say their own health is only fair or poor are more apt to see obesity greatly increasing the risk of heart disease (72 vs. 59 percent), stroke (58 vs. 46 percent), high cholesterol (62 vs. 51 percent), diabetes (74 vs. 64 percent) and high blood pressure (67 vs. 58 percent), compared with those in excellent or very good health. Those in good health fall between the two.

### Current health

Higher body weight is associated with worse self-assessed health. Among adults with a BMI of 30 or more, 23 percent describe their health in general as either excellent or very good; as noted, this compares with 47 percent of the general public in a 2022 survey.

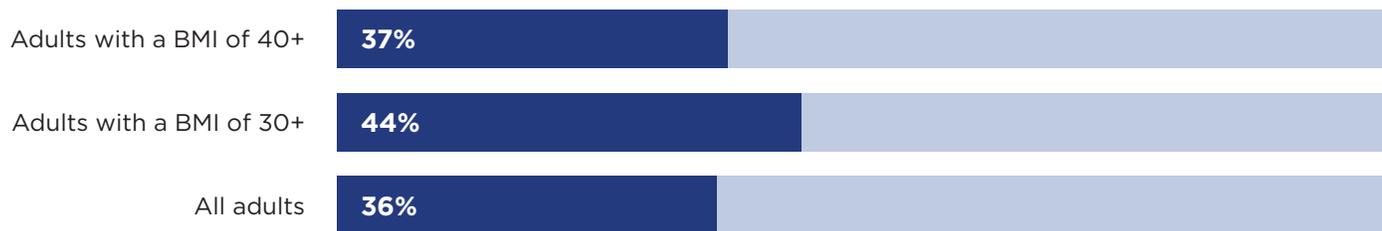
Forty-four percent of adults with a BMI of 30 or more select the middle option, describing their overall health as “good,” while 33 percent describe it as only fair or poor – 16 points more than adults nationally. Negative ratings of overall health peak, at 45 percent, among adults with a BMI of 40 or more.

### How would you describe your health in general?

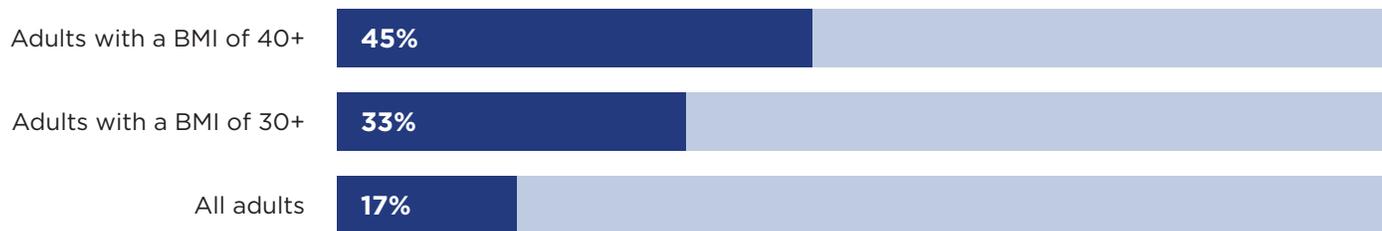
#### Excellent/very good



#### Good



#### Fair/poor



Source of data for all adults: 2022 NPR/Robert Wood Johnson Foundation/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health survey

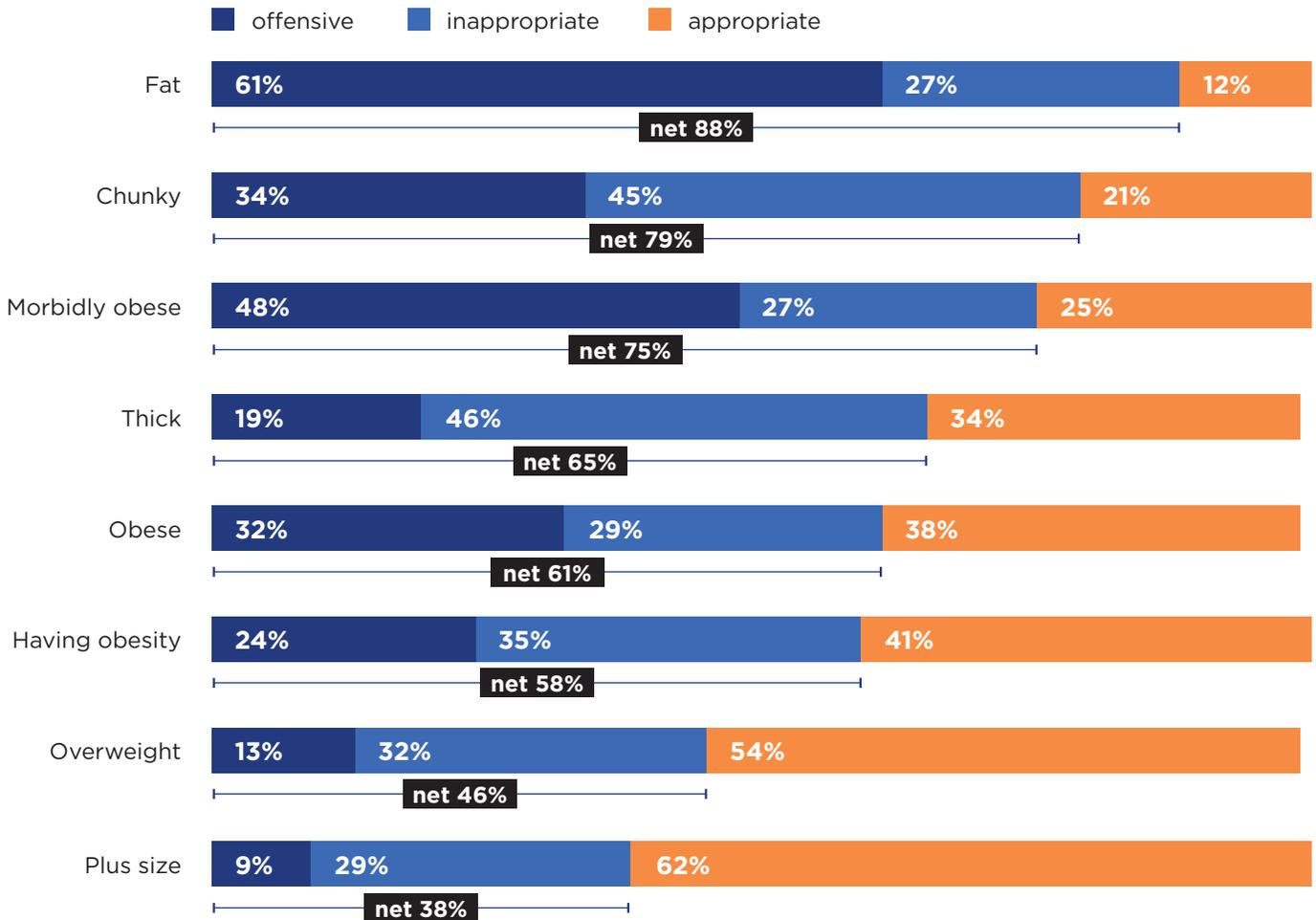
# 07

## Terminology: Offensive, Inappropriate, or Appropriate?

It's logical that one path forward in the media's treatment of people with higher body weight is to arrive at acceptable terminology. This may be challenging: Majorities find six of eight ways of describing a person with higher body weight as either inappropriate or offensive. (Many others, of course, are testable.)

Topping the list, describing someone as fat is seen negatively by a broad 88 percent of people with higher body weight, including 61 percent who see it not only as inappropriate but offensive.

### % calling each term offensive, inappropriate or appropriate



Three-quarters or more respond negatively to the terms chunky (79 percent) and morbidly obese (75 percent, a term offensive to nearly half). These are followed by thick (65 percent), obese (61 percent) and having obesity (58 percent). Fewer see overweight (46 percent) or plus size (38 percent) as inappropriate or offensive.

**% calling each term inappropriate or offensive**

	Women	Men	Difference (women-men)
Obese	67%	55%	+12 points
Having obesity	64%	52%	+12 points
Overweight	51%	41%	+10 points
Fat	92%	84%	+8 points
Chunky	81%	76%	+5 points
Morbidly obese	77%	72%	+5 points
Thick	64%	66%	-2 points
Plus size	33%	43%	-10 points

Women are more apt than men to object to the terms obese (+12 points), having obesity (also +12 points), overweight (+10 points), fat (+8 points) and chunky (+5 points). Men, for their part, are more likely to find “plus size” inappropriate or offensive (+10 points). Younger women are more apt than younger men to reject the terms having obesity (+25 points), overweight (+25 points), obese (+23 points), morbidly obese (+15 points), fat (+13 points) and chunky (+13 points). The gap widens in being offended by the term fat: 72 percent of younger women call this offensive, compared with 37 percent of younger men.

**% calling each term inappropriate or offensive**

	Women age 18-35	Men age 18-35	Difference (women-men)
Having obesity	65%	40%	+25 points
Overweight	57%	32%	+25 points
Obese	69%	46%	+23 points
Morbidly obese	78%	63%	+15 points
Fat	92%	79%	+13 points
Chunky	82%	69%	+13 points
Thick	58%	50%	+8 points
Plus size	29%	35%	-6 points

# 08



## Desired Change: In Their Own Words

Respondents were asked, in their own words, how they would change the way people with higher body weight are portrayed in TV shows or movies. Responses included calls for eliminating harmful stereotypes or tropes, presenting better or more appealing depictions, moving away from associations between weight and attractiveness and focusing less on body weight overall.



I wish they would have them as more attractive. Just because you're of higher body weight doesn't mean you don't deserve someone or aren't pretty or handsome.



I really just wish we were depicted like everyone else, including the potential that other people might find us attractive without being weirdos, or that we need an excuse to be fat, like there must be something wrong with us.



Make a main character that is fat but don't put them in a movie where the main plot is about their weight/beauty standards. Give me an adventure movie with someone who is a little chubby.



Make them appear less "sloppy." Higher body weight doesn't necessarily mean you're a dirty human.



I would like to see them look more fashionable and glamorous.



Larger people can be fit. Don't portray them as weak, sweaty or heavy breathing with the smallest exertion. There are real-size people who work out daily and eat healthy.



Usually they are shown eating. Like, always the one ordering extra food or snacking. Whereas my experience is usually the opposite. Fat people tend to be more self-conscious about the amount they eat than thinner people, are more likely to deprive themselves, order less food when in a group, etc.



Simply put, just because you are fat, doesn't mean you're just funny. The majority of higher-body-weight women in leading roles are placed in comedic roles. Higher-body-weight women can be serious, mean, smart and no-nonsense. I feel media tells women, it's OK to be fat if you're funny, but if you aren't funny, you better lose weight.



I wish that I could watch something with a bigger person and their weight not be focused on **AT ALL**. Even body-positive media feels negative because it still makes it feel like it's important to bring up when it really isn't.



I would change how often I see overweight characters with intense insecurity regarding their weight. While this may be true for some people that struggle with weight, it doesn't encompass everyone that is overweight. I would also change the "fat guy/girl comedy relief" role as well.

Some called for more representation of people with higher body weight in leading roles; others spoke specifically to normalizing body types.



Casting people of higher body weight in lead roles would make shows more relatable.



People with higher body weight are just not cast. Period. I have watched one show on Brit Box where one character was overweight. Now I am watching Suits on Netflix and absolutely no one is overweight or even normal weight. That alone is offensive.



I would cast more actors of higher body weight as main characters in romances, serious dramas and other genres where their weight wouldn't be focused on and made fun of so much.



**It would be nice to see a few more people of higher body weight cast in shows and movies. They are a large percentage of the population, after all.**

“ I would like actors to be the average U.S. size for men and woman. That would normalize body types.

“ Be inclusive of all body types. We shouldn't be made to feel that being skinny is the only way to be.

“ In America, a large portion of the population (proportionally) is overweight or obese, but often a slim margin of portrayals in media exhibit that.

“ Like always, we see **extremes: the perfectly beautiful and the morbidly obese. I do not see people that look like me. It's why I tend to not watch anymore.**

Some respondents said they wouldn't change anything. Here, responses ranged from a sense that portrayals already are improving to a preference for seeing lower body weight people in the media or dismissing the issue as a problem.

I generally think we are going in the right direction and body shaming isn't accepted.

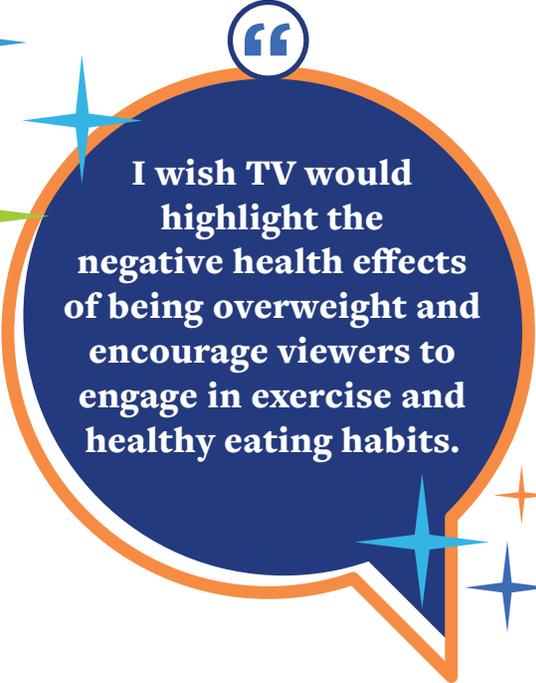
I'm fat. I don't like it, but it is what it is. I work to control it, but to little effect. TV is entertainment. I don't view it as anything but entertainment. I like to see fit and healthy people. Don't add fat people to cater to my feelings, because I prefer attractive people.

**The paradigm of body positivity is much better than in the past. There is nothing that I would change.**

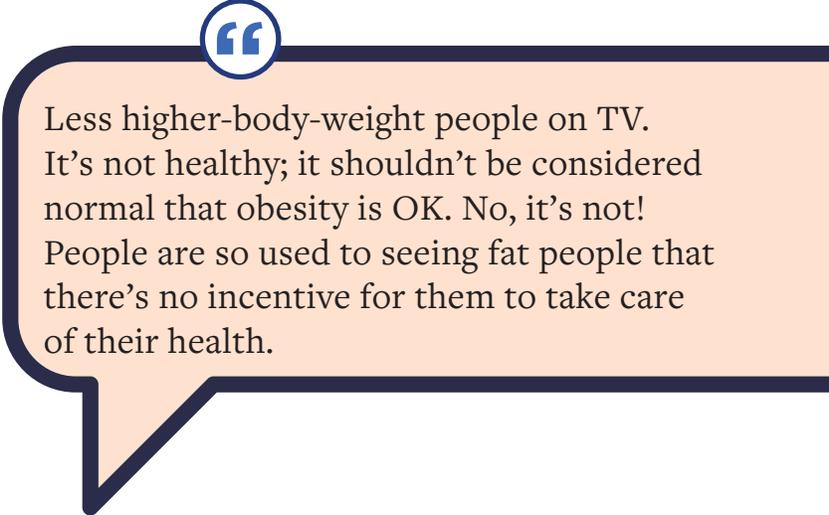
TV shows are beginning to show more realistic people on their shows – more normal, everyday people.

I wouldn't change anything. I believe people get too upset about everything these days. We can't control everything.

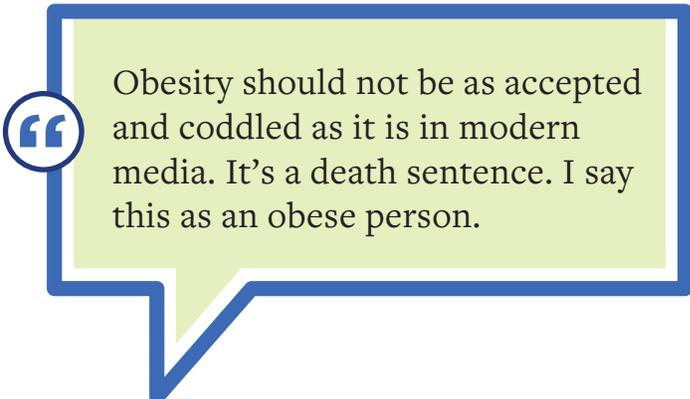
Still others went in another direction, calling for less body positivity or more emphasis on the importance of health and wellness.



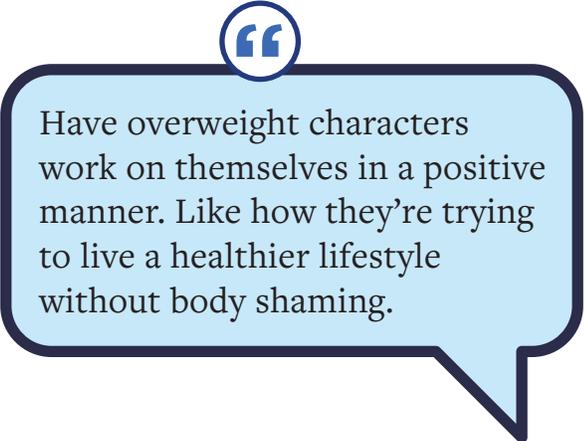
**I wish TV would highlight the negative health effects of being overweight and encourage viewers to engage in exercise and healthy eating habits.**



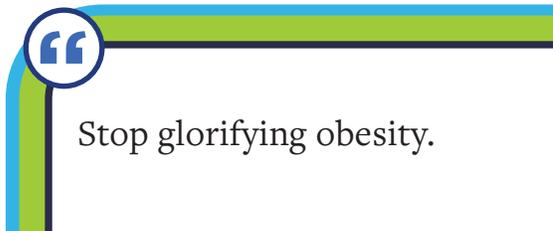
Less higher-body-weight people on TV. It's not healthy; it shouldn't be considered normal that obesity is OK. No, it's not! People are so used to seeing fat people that there's no incentive for them to take care of their health.



Obesity should not be as accepted and coddled as it is in modern media. It's a death sentence. I say this as an obese person.



Have overweight characters work on themselves in a positive manner. Like how they're trying to live a healthier lifestyle without body shaming.



Stop glorifying obesity.

# Appendix A

## Topline Data Report

Full topline results from the 2023 Media Empathy Foundation survey follow. “Skipped” refers to web respondents who did not provide an answer and phone respondents who said they had no opinion/didn’t know. Asterisks in columns indicate <0.5 percent.

1. Using your best estimate, on average, how many hours a day do you spend on these activities?

### a. Watching TV news

	0 hrs	NET	1-3 hours			4+ hours			Mean	SD	Skip.
			1 hr	2 hrs	3 hrs	NET	4 hrs	5+ hrs			
8/14/23	28	55	30	16	9	18	6	12	2.0	2.5	0

### b. Watching TV shows or movies

	0 hrs	NET	1-3 hours			4+ hours			Mean	SD	Skip.
			1 hr	2 hrs	3 hrs	NET	4 hrs	5+ hrs			
8/14/23	4	56	15	24	17	40	13	27	3.6	2.9	0

### c. Using social media

	0 hrs	NET	1-3 hours			4+ hours			Mean	SD	Skip.
			1 hr	2 hrs	3 hrs	NET	4 hrs	5+ hrs			
8/14/23	11	58	26	22	11	31	7	24	3.2	3.3	*

### d. Reading news websites, magazines or newspapers

	0 hrs	NET	1-3 hours			4+ hours			Mean	SD	Skip.
			1 hr	2 hrs	3 hrs	NET	4 hrs	5+ hrs			
8/14/23	28	67	47	17	4	5	1	3	1.2	1.5	*

This survey focuses on media portrayals of people with higher body weight.

2. How often, if ever, do you feel that each of the following types of media portray people of higher body weight in ways that reinforce negative stereotypes?

8/14/23 Summary table:

	More often			Occasionally	Less often/Never			Skip.
	NET	Often	Sometimes		NET	Rarely	Never	
a. TV news	55	27	27	25	20	16	5	*
b. TV shows and movies	65	35	30	23	11	8	3	2
c. Social media	73	48	25	18	7	5	2	2

3. Thinking overall, in which of these ways would you say that the TV shows and movies you see mainly portray people of higher body weight?

	8/14/23
In ways that reinforce negative stereotypes	24
In ways that avoid negative stereotypes	12
In ways that send mixed messages, some positive and some negative	64
Skipped	*

4. (Rotated with Q5) Whether they intend to or not, how often, if ever, do you feel that the TV shows and movies you see engage in body shaming? This refers to subjecting someone to criticism or humiliation for their body shape and size, whether directly or indirectly.

	More often			Occasionally	Less often/Never			Skipped
	NET	Often	Sometimes		NET	Rarely	Never	
8/14/23	53	20	33	27	20	16	3	*

5. (Rotated with Q4) How often, if ever, do you feel that the TV shows and movies you see encourage people to have a positive body image no matter what their weight is?

	More often			Occasionally	Less often/Never			Skipped
	NET	Often	Sometimes		NET	Rarely	Never	
8/14/23	39	11	27	36	25	22	3	*

6. How often, if ever, do you feel that the TV shows and movies you see portray people of higher body weight in these ways?

a. Making fun of their body size or weight

	More often			Occasionally	Less often/Never			Skipped
	NET	Often	Sometimes		NET	Rarely	Never	
8/14/23	56	28	28	25	18	14	4	*

**b. Portraying them as the target of jokes, for comic relief**

	NET	More often		Occasionally	Less often/Never			Skipped
		Often	Sometimes		NET	Rarely	Never	
8/14/23	63	38	26	24	12	10	2	*

**c. Portraying them as unattractive**

	NET	More often		Occasionally	Less often/Never			Skipped
		Often	Sometimes		NET	Rarely	Never	
8/14/23	63	34	28	22	14	11	3	1

**d. Portraying them as evil or cruel**

	NET	More often		Occasionally	Less often/Never			Skipped
		Often	Sometimes		NET	Rarely	Never	
8/14/23	23	7	16	26	50	37	13	1

**e. Portraying them as lazy or unmotivated**

	NET	More often		Occasionally	Less often/Never			Skipped
		Often	Sometimes		NET	Rarely	Never	
8/14/23	60	32	28	23	17	14	3	1

**f. Portraying them as sloppy or disorganized**

	NET	More often		Occasionally	Less often/Never			Skipped
		Often	Sometimes		NET	Rarely	Never	
8/14/23	54	26	27	27	19	16	3	*

**g. Portraying them in storylines that focus on their appearance**

	NET	More often		Occasionally	Less often/Never			Skipped
		Often	Sometimes		NET	Rarely	Never	
8/14/23	55	25	30	25	19	16	3	1

**h. Portraying them in a way that is not defined by their body size**

	NET	More often		Occasionally	Less often/Never			Skipped
		Often	Sometimes		NET	Rarely	Never	
8/14/23	38	12	25	36	26	23	2	1

7. Do the TV shows or movies that you see tend to include people of higher body weight in leading roles, or tend to exclude them from leading roles?

	<b>Tend to include</b>	<b>Tend to exclude</b>	<b>Skipped</b>
8/14/23	20	79	1

8. (IF TV SHOWS TEND TO EXCLUDE PEOPLE OF HIGHER BODY WEIGHT IN LEADING ROLES) Do you think that excluding people of higher body weight from leading roles sends a negative message about them, or not?

	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Skipped</b>
8/14/23	79	20	*

**Q7/Q8 NET table:**

	<b>Tend to include</b>	<b>Tend to exclude</b>			<b>Skipped</b>
		<b>NET</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Not negative</b>	
8/14/23	20	79	63	16	* 1

9. How often, if ever, have portrayals of people of higher body weight on TV shows and in movies made you personally feel disrespected?

	<b>NET</b>	<b>More often</b>		<b>Occasionally</b>	<b>Less often/Never</b>			<b>Skipped</b>
		<b>Often</b>	<b>Sometimes</b>		<b>NET</b>	<b>Rarely</b>	<b>Never</b>	
8/14/23	33	10	23	22	46	23	23	*

10. In each of these areas, do you feel that portrayals of people of higher body weight on TV shows or in movies have had a positive or negative effect on you personally?

**8/14/23 Summary table:**

	<b>Positive</b>			<b>No effect</b>	<b>Negative</b>			<b>Skp.</b>
	<b>NET</b>	<b>Very pos.</b>	<b>Pos.</b>		<b>NET</b>	<b>Neg.</b>	<b>Very neg.</b>	
a. Your self-esteem	17	4	13	49	33	28	5	1
b. Your mental health overall	17	5	12	56	26	23	3	1
c. Your body image	16	4	12	47	36	29	6	1
d. Your efforts to have a healthy lifestyle	29	5	24	54	16	14	2	1
e. Your likelihood to get the health or medical care you need	28	6	22	60	12	10	3	*
f. Your likelihood to get the mental health care you may need	23	5	18	66	11	9	2	*

11. If you could change one thing about the way that people of higher body weight are portrayed in TV shows or in movies, what would it be?

Compiled separately.

12. Thinking now about the news media, do you think health news on each of these items receives too (much) coverage, too (little) coverage, or about the right amount of coverage?

8/14/23 Summary table:

	Too much	Too little	Right amount	Skipped
a. Medical treatment for obesity	33	34	33	1
b. Potential health consequences of having obesity	30	31	38	1
c. The “body positivity” movement, which encourages acceptance of all body shapes and sizes	35	31	33	*
d. The causes of obesity	34	34	31	1
e. The link between obesity and heart disease	28	29	42	1
f. The link between obesity and diabetes	27	30	41	1
g. The link between obesity and mental health conditions	36	37	27	*

13. In health news reports, do you feel that obesity tends to be covered in ways that blame people for their body weight, or not?

	Yes, it does	No, it does not	Skipped
8/14/23	70	29	*

14. Do you feel that health news reports tend to suggest that all people of higher body weight are unhealthy?

	Yes, they do	No, they do not	Skipped
8/14/23	79	21	1

15. Which of these best describes the way the news media overall show images of people of higher body weight?

	Sensitive/respectful	Neutral	Humiliating/dehumanizing	Skipped
8/14/23	8	49	42	*

16. As ways to describe a person of a higher body weight, do you find each of the following terms appropriate, inappropriate but not offensive, or offensive?

8/14/23 Summary table:

	Appropriate	Inappropriate or offensive			Skipped
		NET	Inappropriate, not offensive	Offensive	
a. Fat	12	88	27	61	*
b. Overweight	54	46	32	13	1
c. Obese	38	61	29	32	1
d. Plus size	62	38	29	9	*
e. Having obesity	41	58	35	24	1
f. Morbidly obese	25	75	27	48	*
g. Chunky	21	79	45	34	1
h. Thick	34	65	46	19	1

17. Have you ever felt you were teased or treated unfairly because of your weight?

	Yes	No	Skipped
8/14/23	65	35	*

18. If you honestly assessed yourself, would you say that you have at least some negative feelings about people of higher body weight?

	Yes	No	Skipped
8/14/23	47	53	*

19. Would you say that you have at least some negative feelings about people who have obesity?

	Yes	No	Skipped
8/14/23	48	51	1

20. How often, if ever, do you direct negative feelings at yourself because of your weight?

	More often			Occasionally	Less often/Never			Skipped
	NET	Often	Sometimes		NET	Rarely	Never	
8/14/23	53	29	24	24	23	14	8	*

21. How would you describe your health in general?

	Excellent/very good			Good	Fair/poor			Skipped
	NET	Excellent	Very good		NET	Fair	Poor	
8/14/23	23	3	19	44	33	28	5	*

Compare to all adults (Harvard School of Public Health/NPR survey):

	Excellent/very good			Good	Fair/poor			Skipped
	NET	Excellent	Very good		NET	Fair	Poor	
6/13/22	47	12	35	36	17	14	3	NA

22. As far as you know, does obesity increase a person’s risk of developing the following, or not?

8/14/23 Summary table:

	A lot	Somewhat	A little	Does not increase risk	Skipped
a. Cancer	15	32	24	28	1
b. Heart disease	66	25	6	1	1
c. Diabetes	69	23	5	2	*
d. High cholesterol	57	31	9	3	*
e. Stroke	52	34	10	4	*
f. High blood pressure	65	27	6	1	*
g. Mental health conditions	26	41	22	11	1

# Appendix B

## Survey Methodology

This survey was produced for the Media Empathy Foundation by [Langer Research Associates](#). Field work was conducted via the probability-based SSRS Opinion Panel, in which participants are randomly recruited via address-based sampling to take surveys online or by telephone.

The survey was designed to consist of approximately 1,195 adults with a body mass index of 30 or higher. Oversamples were drawn to obtain results from at least 200 adults in each of these groups: 18- to 25-year-olds, Black adults and Hispanic adults.

Field work was conducted July 25-Aug. 14, 2023, in English and Spanish. After initial invitations, multiple email or SMS reminders were sent during the field period. Out of 7,121 panel members invited to participate, completed, qualified surveys were provided by 1,253. Participants completed the survey in a median time of 10 minutes.

In quality control, the fastest 1 percent of respondents in total completion time were flagged for possible inattention, as were those who skipped more than a quarter of the questions; these 12 cases were deleted. One respondent was removed for providing an invalid response to the screener questions. The final sample included 1,240 adults, including 206 adults age 18-25, 203 Black adults and 224 Hispanic adults; 1,177 completed the survey online and 63 by telephone.

Data were weighted via iterative proportional fitting to the following benchmark distributions of the 2021 National Health Interview Survey:

- Age (18-25, 26-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, 65+)
- Sex (male, female) by age (18-25, 26+)
- Race/ethnicity (white, Black, Hispanic, other and 2+ races/ethnicities) by sex (male, female)
- Education (less than high school, high school graduate, some college/associate degree, bachelor's degree or higher)
- Census region (Northeast, Midwest, South, West)

Weights were trimmed at the 2nd and 98th percentiles. The survey has a design effect due to weighting of 1.11, resulting in margins of sampling error of plus or minus 2.9 percentage points for the full sample. Error margins are larger for subgroups. Sampling error is not the only source of differences in polls.

**Demographic comparison of survey data and weighting benchmarks**

	<b>Unweighted (%)</b>	<b>Weighted (%)</b>	<b>Benchmark (%)</b>
18-25 years old	17.0	9.3	9.2
26-34 years old	15.1	16.0	16.0
35-44 years old	15.6	18.3	18.2
45-54 years old	16.5	19.0	19.0
55-64 years old	18.1	18.6	18.5
65+ years old	17.7	18.8	19.1
18-25 male	4.4	4.2	4.2
26+ male	40.2	44.2	44.3
18-25 female	12.4	5.1	5.0
26+ female	42.9	46.6	46.5
White, non-Hispanic, male	27.6	30.9	30.8
White, non-Hispanic, female	31.8	29.9	29.7
Black, non-Hispanic, male	5.9	5.5	5.9
Black, non-Hispanic, female	10.9	9.7	9.7
Hispanic, male	9.0	9.5	9.5
Hispanic, female	9.7	9.6	9.5
Other or 2+ races, non-Hispanic, male	2.2	2.4	2.4
Other or 2+ races, non-Hispanic, female	3.0	2.5	2.5
Less than high school	9.4	10.1	10.5
High school graduate	29.6	29.8	29.8
Some college/associate degree	33.3	32.2	32.0
Bachelor's or higher	27.7	27.9	27.7
Northeast	17.1	15.0	15.0
Midwest	21.7	22.5	22.5
South	40.2	40.5	40.6
West	21.0	22.0	21.9