



DEBATE THE WEIGHT!

Deconstructing the WOTN Trailer

The Weight of the Nation (WOTN) [trailer](#) contains a number of statements that contain innuendo, hyperbole, and inaccuracies. As we are preparing [this response](#), we don't have access to an advance version of the documentary, but we can address the statements in the trailer to offer viewers an alternative viewpoint. Below we have listed each statement made in the WOTN trailer, and our corresponding HAESSM point of view.

Statement from <i>Weight of the Nation</i> Trailer	Our Response
"I'm five foot ten and 242 pounds."	This statement, in and of itself, tells us nothing about the state of the speaker's health. It is misleading to use BMI (a ratio of height to weight) as a proxy for health assessment.
"I always say this is the biggest I'm ever going to be and I said that like 20 pounds ago."	Without more detailed information about this individual, we cannot assess the health impact. If he is gaining weight while dieting to lose weight, as many Americans do, then he may be suffering from the effects of weight cycling ("yo yo dieting"), which not only often leads to weight gain, but is associated with poor health and increased mortality.
"A third of Americans are obese and another third is overweight."	This statement is based on the use of BMI charts. See above.
"Obesity is the biggest threat to the health, welfare, and future of this country"	This statement represents fear-mongering, pure and simple. Obesity has been associated with various chronic diseases, but it is bad science to suggest that obesity causes these disease states. Remember that correlation does not equal causation. It can be hard to separate out the exaggerations and sensationalism from the evidence-based facts, but we can do better than this, surely. To say that "obesity," which is merely a certain height-weight ratio, is the "biggest threat" to the future of our country must be seen as a desperate act of hyperbole.

Statement from *Weight of the Nation* Trailer

Our Response

“I’ve always been overweight.”

And...? This statement is made as if it is self-explanatory. Sadly, in our fat-phobic culture, this sentence alone may be enough to convey that the speaker must have lived a lifetime of misery. The diets, the bullying, the shame, the stigma, the self-loathing... being overweight is a self-evident curse, right? In reality, this statement tells us nothing about the quality of this person’s life, and it’s insulting that the filmmakers think that it does.

“I’ve got diabetes ... sleep apnea ... heart disease.”

So do lots of thin people. At most, there are correlations or associations of “obesity” with certain chronic diseases. These diseases can best be addressed by focusing on health behaviors rather than body weight. Weight is not a behavior.

“Everything is hurting now.”

Chronic pain is experienced by people of all sizes. When thin people are in chronic pain, health professionals offer a variety of medical treatments, as well as mind-body approaches and alternative and complementary approaches, for managing, reducing, and eliminating pain. When fat people are in chronic pain, health professionals tell them to lose weight. This amounts to a breach of ethics. Not only is it inappropriate to assume that adipose tissue is causing the pain, there is [no known safe and effective strategy for long-term weight reduction](#).

“It’s a lot easier to lose weight than it is to keep weight off.”

No argument here. Again, there has never been quality evidence of a long-term, effective weight loss method.

“This is probably going to be the first generation of children who are going to have a shorter life expectancy than their parents.”

This is another example of fear-mongering of the worst kind. This claim was first made—without any evidence to back it up—by some researchers who [later admitted](#) it was based on “back of the envelope” figures and that they “never meant for them to be portrayed as precise.” It’s been repeated so often, that few question its source any more. The truth is that people living in industrialized democracies are living longer than their parents and grandparents, with no evidence of a reversal of that trend. [In fact](#), the “overweight” category of BMI is statistically the longest-lived, and there is evidence that “overweight” may be protective among older adults. Moreover, even if there were a demonstrable link between BMI and longevity, the general trends toward a rise in the average BMI has [leveled off in the past decade](#). The numbers simply do not bear out the claim that our children will not live as long as we do.

Statement from *Weight of the Nation* Trailer

Our Response

<p>“18% of our children right now are obese.”</p>	<p>The use of terms such as “obese” and “overweight” to categorize children is highly suspect. In 2007, researchers apparently felt that we were not sufficiently panicked about “childhood obesity,” so they introduced new terminology guaranteed to make us more fearful. The result? More fear-mongering. BMI measurement in schools. Increased incidence of eating disorders and disordered eating among young children. Increased stigma and bullying. Parents withholding needed nourishment from infants and young children. Contrary to the rhetoric of panic, we have much bigger problems than a statistical rise in the size of our children over the last few decades.</p>
<p>“It’s not only health, it’s about survival and well being of the United States as a nation.”</p>	<p>It’s difficult to come up with a counter argument for hyperbole such as this. Apparently, fat people are the root cause of all bad things. Poverty, disease, war, tornadoes, tsunamis... yep, that’s right, all the fault of fat people.</p>
<p>“You don’t crave broccoli, and our generation has grown up craving a Big Mac.”</p>	<p>The practice of intuitive or mindful eating functions on several levels. It separates nourishment from judgment or morality and connects us with our body’s needs for both nutrition and pleasure in eating. Broccoli vs. Big Mac is a false dichotomy. With a Health At Every Size® approach, it is possible to eat in a manner which balances individual nutritional needs, hunger, satiety, appetite, and pleasure.</p>
<p>“I want to think there’s something better for me.”</p>	<p>There is. We invite you to give up body hatred and harmful dieting practices. We invite you to walk away from shame and fear, and embrace a Health At Every Size® approach to living well.</p>
<p>“Unless we are able to control this epidemic, we are going to have an abundance of chronic disease.”</p>	<p>We should be addressing chronic disease head on. Let’s focus all this misplaced energy where it belongs and begin a real dialogue about what we can and should do to reduce and prevent diabetes, heart disease, and other chronic diseases. Moreover, focusing our public health efforts on obesity does a disservice to thin people. In the current obesity-obsessed climate, it would be easy for them to get the mistaken impression that healthy equals thin, and so they don’t need to be concerned with nutrition, fitness, stress levels, preventive care, and other contributors to good health.</p>

Statement from <i>Weight of the Nation</i> Trailer	Our Response
“All of us have to be part of the solution to reduce obesity.”	In the context of the rhetoric about the “dangers” of obesity and how obesity is going to “crush” us, this comment sounds more like an invitation to a lynch mob than a search for collective approaches to health promotion. Way to promote bullying and stigma, HBO!
“The weight of the nation is out of control but we can fix that.”	This reads to us like code for the idea that fat people are out of control. No one – neither fat people nor thin people – needs to be “fixed.” Fat people can be fine as they are, and like thin people, they just want to be supported in their efforts to live happy, healthy, and fulfilling lives.
“If we don’t now take this as a really urgent national priority, we are all gonna pay the price.”	See comment on hyperbole above. Also, an important subtext of this comment is the old chestnut about how much money obesity contributes to our health care costs. These claims are based on the health care costs associated with diseases for which researchers have found <i>correlation</i> with obesity. This is a false premise: correlation does not equal causation.
“Obesity will crush the United States in oblivion.”	Once again, playing the hyperbole card. This one is particularly offensive, given the implicit imagery of fat people “crushing” innocent bystanders with their massive, scary bodies.
Tagline (on screen at end of trailer): To win, we have to lose.	Engaging in a weight loss regimen is not only futile for most people, but as noted above, potentially harmful. We don’t have to lose. We do have to snap out of this cultural trance that convinces us that it is wise or even possible to attempt to control a population’s weight. We have to stop talking about health in terms of “winning” and “losing.” We have to focus on health and well-being, not on weight.

For more information, please visit:
our [Debate The Weight](#) webpage or
[The Association for Size Diversity and Health](#).