Introduction
The ways in which people with particular body sizes and shapes are deemed more or less desirable than others is a key issue in contemporary society. Concerns around body size and shape are regular features in the mass media and in policy debates. Geographical research within this particular field has tended to focus on bodies that are fat, obese or large, yet those who are small, tall or thin may also be subject to experiences of exclusion and marginalisation. Political action may change the nature of inequalities relating to body size, as may the ways in which the intersections between other social identities body size work to shape how different bodies are interpreted, negotiated and represented.

Author recommends
1. Bell, D., and Valentine, G. (1997). Consuming geographies: we are where we eat. London: Routledge. This book explores the complex sets of relationships that exist between food and place. Chapter 2 on the 'body' provides a very useful discussion about the stereotypes and assumptions made about body size and the ways in which these vary in different places and cultures.

2. Colls, R. (2006). Outsize/Outside: bodily bignesses and the emotional experiences of British women shopping for clothes. Gender, Place and Culture 13, pp. 529–545. This excellent article explores what it feels like when big women shop for clothes, the emotional geographies connected with the process of evaluating the suitability of clothing and purchasing (or not) particular items.


4. Cooper, C. (1998). Fat and proud: the politics of size. London: The Women’s Press. This is an excellent book - that is suitable for academic and popular audiences - that challenges stereotypes about fatness and discusses the processes that support and encourage fatphobia. It also overturns assumptions about fatness, food and ill health and explores the emergence of the Fat Rights movement.

5. Crewe, L. (2001). The besieged body: geographies of retailing and consumption. Progress in Human Geography 25, pp. 629–640. This useful review article charts the ways in which the body is connected to sets of economic issues and cultural relations associated with issues such as retail regulation and consumer choice discussing concerns around fitness, fashion and food.
This critical paper explores the ways in which policies aimed at promoting healthy living can marginalise and stigmatise obese young people as the operation of such policies works to reinforce vulnerabilities experienced by such young people.

This paper offers a critical reading of a UK policy document in the context of debates about obesity. In doing so, it seeks to promote a critical approach that problematises the medicalisation of the body size in the formation of policy.

This review article sets out an agenda for the study of fat bodies within geography and in doing so provides a useful overview of related literature and debates. It explores some of the reasons why fatness has been overlooked within the discipline and suggests that future research could focus on a range of scales and theories.

This impressive book provides a critical overview of social research about the body including discussion about issues relating to self-identity, sexuality, reproductive technology and social inequalities.

Amongst a range of issues, this excellent chapter discusses the ‘medicalisation of social life’, pointing to the ways in which experiences of health or illness are accompanied by attitudinal and behavioural assumptions which may be used in determining access to resources.

**Online materials**

1. National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance, USA
   A non-profit civil rights organisation that aims to end size discrimination

2. Tall Person’s Club Great Britain and Ireland
   [http://www.tallclub.co.uk/index.asp](http://www.tallclub.co.uk/index.asp)
   An organisation that aims to promote the interests of tall people

3. Short Statured People of Australia
An organisation that offers support and information for people of short stature (under 150cm (4’11’’))

4. International Size Acceptance Movement
http://www.size-acceptance.org/
An international organisation that seeks to promote size acceptance and fight size discrimination across the world.

5. Charlotte Cooper’s blog
http://www.obesitytimebomb.blogspot.com/
A very useful blog by Charlotte Cooper that is regularly updated with information about events, publications and workshops.

6. Fat Studies and Health at Every Size ESRC seminar series
http://www.dur.ac.uk/geography/research/researchprojects/fat_studies_and_health_at_every_size/
The website for this ESRC funded seminar series includes details of all of the seminars as well as additional references.

7. UK Department of Business, Innovation and Skills, Tackling Obesity: Future Choices
A UK government website with links to reports and publications about obesity.

Sample syllabus: critical geographies of body size

Critical geographies of body size could be an interesting topic to include in modules about social and cultural geographies more generally as well as specific modules about geographies of the body, social justice and exclusion, or critical approaches to health and well-being.

TOPICS FOR LECTURE AND DISCUSSION

WEEK I: Introduction

TOPIC: What is ‘the body’?

What are some of the different definitions of ‘the body’?
What are the different conceptual approaches that social researchers use when discussing bodies?

WEEK II: Bodies and space

TOPIC: The relationships between bodies, space and place.

In what ways is ‘the body’ a place or site in itself?
What are the relationships between bodies and place, how can these be researched and what influence do bodies have on place and vice versa?

**WEEK III: Critical geographies of body size**

Topic: Thinking critically about the negative stereotyping of people with particular body sizes.


What are the stereotypes associated with people who are fat, thin, small or tall?
How are these stereotypes reinforced and replicated in society?

**WEEK IV: Obesogenic environments and the body**

**TOpic:** Obesogenic environments and the relationships between the environment, health and body size


What are obesogenic environments and how does this concept help us to understand the relationships between health, bodies and environments?
What are the benefits and limitations of the obesogenic environments discourse?

**WEEK V: Fat Studies and Health at Every Size**

**TOpic:** The emergence of the interdisciplinary fields of Fat Studies and Health at Every Size (HEAS)


What are the key principles behind Fat Studies, how and when did this field emerge and what approach does it take to body size?
What is meant by Health at Every Size and how does this approach understand bodies?

**WEEK VI:**  **Obesity: epidemic or moral panic?**

**TOPIC:** An critical exploration ‘the obesity epidemic’ (this could be organised as a classroom debate)


To what extent do you consider there to be an obesity epidemic and what are the main factors creating this?

What challenges have been made to the common-sense assumption that we are experiencing an obesity epidemic?

**WEEK VII:**  **Negotiating sizist society**

**TOPIC:** Social and spatial exclusions in sizist society


In what ways are people with different body sizes socially and spatially restricted within contemporary society?

How does sizism intersect with other inequalities associated with age, disability, class, gender, sexuality or ethnicity?

**WEEK VIII:**  **Everyday socio-spatial encounters and lived experiences**

**TOPIC:** The everyday lived experiences and negotiations of


What are the time-space strategies employed by people as a result of their body size?
Explore the emotional geographies associated with such experiences.

**WEEK IX: Critical approaches: informing policy and practice**

**TOPIC:** The relationships between public policy and body size


Outline some of the challenges of making public policy about body size?

What are the positive and negative outcomes of such policies for promoting health and well-being?

**WEEK X: Conclusions**

**TOPIC:** Overview of perspectives on body size and concluding discussion


Outline the different approaches – and their strengths and weaknesses - to understanding the relationships between body size and place?

What do you think the future issues and debates about body size will focus upon?

**Focus questions**

1. What are some of the socio-spatial exclusions experienced by people who are small, tall, fat or thin?

2. Discuss some of the ways in which stereotypes about size vary between different nations or cultures.

3. Explore the ways in which social identities – such as gender, class, sexuality and race – change the meanings of different body size and shapes and vice versa.

4. Critically discuss the challenges in making policies for regulating body size and shape.

5. What do feminist perspectives contribute to our understandings of the geographies of body size?