

Sarah Lawrence College

Seminar, Spring 2026

Professor: Jessica Lief, LCSW, MLS, DSW Candidate (2026)

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-You can call me Professor Lief

Course Description: Eating Disorders and Social Justice

Eating Disorders and Social Justice is a seminar course, offered during the spring semester, and open to all Sarah Lawrence students (Sophomores and above, including graduate students). Eating disorders are an epidemic in our society. And yet, a core myth remains that this disease disproportionately impacts white, young, privileged women. However, research shows us that eating disorders disproportionately impact individuals of color, individuals of various gender identities and expressions, the LGBTQIA community, folks with disabilities, older individuals, men, as well as veterans and athletes. Through class discussion, lecture, movies, memoir, art, essays, and reflection papers, this course is designed to teach students how to understand eating disorders as a social justice issue with particular attention to understanding feminist, Black feminist, womanist, and eco-womanist perspectives. At the conclusion of the course, students will be equipped with advocacy, problem-solving, and active listening skills and knowledge about how issues related to diversity, racism, oppression, homophobia, transphobia, microaggressions, poverty, violence, trauma, disability justice, reproductive justice, and intersectionality impact individuals with eating disorders. Students will have opportunities to apply learning to settings specific to their personal interests and chosen paths. Particular focus will also be on informed consent, as well as bioethical dilemmas with regard to treatment of eating disorders, as well as disability justice perspectives. The learning objectives are designed to help students how to think and not what to think about eating disorders. The field of eating disorder treatment is continuously evolving, and we are in need of reform at every level. Through the course, students will gain the necessary skills to understand how to treat eating disorders as a social justice issue and engage in prevention and policy work. Students will also understand the medical complications of eating disorders.

At the conclusion of the course, students will be able to:

1. Develop a critical awareness of personal and social identities, values and opportunities to promote social justice when learning about individuals, families, and groups in eating disorder treatment
2. Cultivate learning, embedded with empathy and awareness, of the inequities faced by marginalized groups of people suffering from eating disorders
3. Describe the impact that human diversity and the intersection of race, gender, socioeconomic status, and power have on people suffering from eating disorders
4. Develop effective communication skills to invite discussions on race, racism and power to advance social justice in eating disorder treatment
5. Understand important theoretical frameworks that underpin our treatment of eating disorders, including womanism, eco-womanism, feminism, Black feminism

Required Texts:

The required texts will be made available through the e-library located within this Canvas course at no cost to students. Hard copies of all texts will also be on reserve and available at the Smith College Library, Nielson.

- Atkins, D. (Ed.). (1998). *Looking queer: Body image and identity in lesbian, bisexual, gay, and transgender communities*. Harrington Park Press.
- Aviv, R *Strangers to Ourselves*
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- Bacon, L. (2010). *Health at every size: The surprising truth about your weight*. BenBella Books.
- Berg, J. W. (2019). *Informed consent: Legal theory and clinical practice* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Chang, S. C., Singh, A. A., & dickey, I. m. (2018). *A clinician's guide to gender-affirming care: Working with transgender and gender nonconforming clients*. New Harbinger Publications.
- Elkin, L. (2023). *Art monsters: Unruly bodies in feminist art* (1st American ed.). Publisher.
- Ellis-Ordway, N., & Osborn, T. (2025). *Weight and wisdom: Reflections on working for decades on body liberation*. Pearlsong Press.
- Gangloff, T. (2025). *Chronic illness and eating disorders: Assessment, clinical skills, and lived experiences* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003500254>
- Gaudiani, J. L. (2018). *Sick enough: A guide to the medical complications of eating disorders*. Routledge.
- Gay, R. (2017). *Hunger: A memoir of (my) body*. Harper.
- Grealy, L. (1994). *Autobiography of a face*. Houghton Mifflin.

- Harris, M. L. (2017). *Ecowomanism: African American women and earth-honoring faiths*. Orbis Books.
- Harrison, D. L. (2021). *Belly of the beast: The politics of anti-fatness as anti-blackness*. North Atlantic Books.
- hooks, b. (2014). *Feminist theory: From margin to center*. Routledge.
- Hornbacher, M. (1998). *Wasted: A memoir of anorexia and bulimia*. Harper Perennial.
- Kendall, M. (2020). *Hood feminism: Notes from the women that a movement forgot*. Viking.
- Kinavey, H., & Sturtevant, D. (2019). *Body trust: A revolutionary guide to letting go of food and body shame*. Harmony Books.
- Knapp, C. (1996). *Appetites: Why women want*. Counterpoint.
- Miles, T. (2022). *Wild girls: How the outdoors shaped the women who challenged a nation*. W. W. Norton & Company.
- Morales, A. L. (2019). *Kindling: Writings on the body*. Cambridge University Press.
- Nash, J. C. (2019). *Black feminism reimaged: After intersectionality*. Duke University Press.
- Orbach, S. (2016). *Fat is a feminist issue*. Penguin Books.
- Strings, S. (2019). *Fearing the black body: The racial origins of fat phobia*. NYU Press.
- Thompson, B. (1994). *A hunger so wide and so deep: A multiracial view of women's eating problems*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Tovar, V. (2018). *You have the right to remain fat*. Feminist Press.
- Williams, A. K., Owens, R., & Syedullah, J. (2016). *Radical dharma: Talking race, love, and liberation*. North Atlantic Books.

Objective:

The objective of the course is to equip you with the knowledge and understanding to work with people struggling with eating disorders and to consider the various social justice issues important to their treatment.

Outcomes:

This course will equip you with ways to think critically about a very complicated disease. This course will not teach you what to think but how to think about eating disorders as a social justice issue.

Assessment:

You will be assessed by how well you show up for the class and for yourself and are engaged. You will be assessed by how well you understand the material and can show you know how to think critically about it.

Inclusive Classroom Policy

In our community at Sarah Lawrence College, diversity is an invitation to celebrate the uniqueness of each individual, as well as the cultural differences that enrich us all. In this course, I will do my best to ensure that students from all backgrounds and perspectives are

served and represented equitably. The diversity that students bring to this class will be viewed as a resource, strength, and benefit. I will present materials and activities that are respectful and inclusive of the many identities of students, in terms of gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, culture, perspective, ability and other background characteristics.

The commitment to take care of one another is very important to me as an instructor and as a member of this community. Your academic success, and your whole person well-being, are very important to all of us at the college. If at any time during the semester you find that you are experiencing health problems, life stressors, caregiving responsibilities as a parent, family member or partner or emotional difficulties that are interfering with your academic or personal success, please make an appointment with me so I can support you. I will provide direct support, to connect you with student wellness leaders, or make referrals to campus or community partners to ensure that you have everything you need to succeed to the best of your ability within and beyond the classroom.

Your identity should always be a source of pride, and the classroom should serve as a protected place where all identities can thrive. It is therefore my intent that students from all diverse backgrounds and perspectives be well served by this course, that students' learning needs be addressed both in and out of class, and that the diversity that students bring to this class be viewed as a resource, strength, and benefit. In addition to presenting readings, materials, and activities that intend to be representative of diversity: gender, sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, and culture, your suggestions are encouraged and appreciated. Please let me know ways to improve the effectiveness and inclusivity of the course. In addition, if any of our class meetings conflict with religious activities, please let me know in advance so that we can make arrangements.

EVALUATION OF ASSIGNMENTS

ASSIGNMENTS/CLASS PARTICIPATION:

I understand that there will be times that you will have to miss class for a variety of reasons, and I fully accept that we are all humans and life challenges will inevitably interfere with our plans. As long as you participate in class and make an effort, you can receive full credit for class participation. If you miss more than 2 classes, I will invite you to meet with me to co-create a plan to produce similar work so that you can receive full credit.

ASSIGNMENT #1 (Due week 2)

As students, it is important to reflect on your social identities, experiences, and understanding of intersectionality and any power dynamics at play when it comes to eating disorders and body image issues. This paper aims to help you gain a deeper awareness of how these factors shape your perspectives and interactions within various social contexts, including body image and eating disorders. This assignment asks you to pick a social justice issue that is important to you or that you relate to on a personal level and discuss it in relation to your own body image story.

Length and Format

- Write an essay of 4 pages .
- Use a standard font (e.g., Times New Roman, 12-point), double-space your text.
- Include a title page with your name, the course title, the date, and the assignment title
- Please use APA citations for this assignment.

Content

Reflect on the following prompts, incorporating personal experiences, observations, and course materials (lectures, readings, discussions)... You are also welcome to use your own sources that are of interest to you:

- Describe your social identities. Consider aspects such as race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, nationality, religion, ability, and other relevant categories. Discuss these identities in relation to your own body image story.
- Reflect on how these identities influence your day-to-day experiences, opportunities, and interactions with others. Discuss this in relation to your body image.
- Share a personal experience where your body image was targeted for being different. This could be a moment where you felt acutely aware of your size, hair color, disability, etc.
- Analyze how this experience impacted your understanding of inclusion, exclusion, equity and power. How did it make you feel? What biases or assumptions entered in? How did it shape your interactions and relationships?
- Reflect on an instance where you observed or were part of a power dynamic influenced by your body image. This could be in a classroom, workplace, or any other social context.
- Discuss the power structures at play. Who held power? Who was marginalized? How did these dynamics affect the individuals involved and the broader environment?
- Discuss anything else in relation to your own body image story that feels important to this assignment

ASSIGNMENT #2 (Due every week)

Write a reflection essay (about two pages) every week. Use your own sources and sources from the syllabus. Please show that you have read the material and thought critically about it. This is due before the start of class each week.

MIDTERM ESSAY ASSIGNMENT #3 (Week 6)

The final essay asks you to pick a **memoir of your choice** on eating disorders. There are four listed, but you are also welcome to find your own. Each memoir grapples with multiple social justice issues, including race, disability, socioeconomic status, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation etc. Please read one memoir and complete a case conceptualization of the person in your book. Define Womanism, Eco-Womanism, Feminism, and Black Feminism. Apply one of these frameworks or multiple to your character and the social justice issues they experience. Analyze their experience of an eating disorder as a social justice issue. Define and analyze intersectionality and apply this concept to your character. Use your own sources, as well as sources from the syllabus. 8-10 pages.

Four memoirs listed:

- *Autobiography of a Face* by Lucy Grealy
- *Wasted* by Marya Hornbacher
- *Hunger* by Roxane Gay
- *Appetites* by Caroline Knapp
- *In The Dream House* by Carmen Maria Machado

Grading

There is no formal rubric for these assignments. I am providing some structure for learners who may require it in the length and formatting instructions above; however, as long as you complete the work in a way that feels honest and as authentic as possible for you, and make an attempt to respond to the prompts above, full credit will be extended. The class is graded by written evaluations. Outlines can also be provided if needed.

If you find any aspect of this assignment challenging or triggering, please reach out to me for support, and we can co-create alternative arrangements.

AI

Please refrain from using AI. You need to learn to write well as a professional/academic. You may use AI for citations/help with outlining your work.

Policy on Graded Assignments

Assignments are expected on the due date; however, I am open to meeting with you to discuss your personal circumstances and learning needs in order to collaborate on an extension or alternate plan. This process is important as it models collaborative, problem-solving behaviors that are expected in learning environments, as well as diverse professional contexts.

Grading Scale

Grades are provided in the form of written evaluations.

Office of Accessibility Services

The office of accessibility services is available through email and through the Sarah Lawrence College website. Please make an appointment with them and submit paperwork for any accommodation you may need. These accommodations may include turning your camera off, flexible attendance, flexible due dates, extensions, breastfeeding support etc.

Access and Disability Services. If you have a disability that you anticipate will affect your participation in the activities, coursework, or assessment of objectives of this course, please contact the Assistant Dean of Access and Disability Services, Kara Barrows at kbarrows@sarahlawrence.edu or 914.395.2235 to discuss possibilities for accommodations. Under the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitations Act of 1973, all students, with or without disabilities, are entitled to equal access to the programs and activities of Sarah Lawrence. Please also visit this page for more information about Disability Services. You can, of course, always talk to me as well

Title IX

The Title IX coordinator is Kristin Collado, ESQ. Her email is titleix@sarahlawrence.edu and 914-395-2575. Their office is located in Bates, Room 220. They are available through email, phone call, and through the website. If you feel you are being discriminated against on the basis of gender. Please reach out to their department. This department is also responsible for caregiving responsibilities and accommodations. More specifically, if students are pregnant, postpartum, or struggling with childcare, this would be the appropriate person to speak with for support.

Writing Center

The writing center is available for students. You can make appointments with throughout the semester by visiting their website. They are available for support with writing content, style, grammar, flow, and APA citations.

<https://www.sarahlawrence.edu/library/learningcommons/writingcenter.html>

Library

The library is available to all students. Our readings are placed on reserve. Librarians are also available to meet with you should you need help with research. Please visit their website for more information.

Recommended Tech/Software

Computer, tablet, zoom, web browser, google drive, reliable internet, pdf reader

If you are missing any of the recommended tech and software or if you need help with access, you are responsible for asking about this before class starts. To borrow a laptop from Sarah Lawrence, please visit this page (must be logged in to MySLC to access) to see what is available through the audiovisual department

Absences/Tardiness

Given that this class requires active in-class participation to succeed, I expect you to attend all lectures and group conferences on time. Please provide advance notice if you will be absent/late, and contact me as soon as possible so we can make a plan together for making up any missed work. I will make note of tardiness over 5 minutes, which may impact your participation and evaluation.

Research indicates that the presence of electronic devices in the classroom can lead to distractions, reduced attention spans, and a decline in academic performance. A tech-free environment promotes face-to-face interactions and authentic, compassionate communication. To create an environment that is focused on learning, critical thinking, and positive communication, we will all do our part to keep our class as tech-free as possible. For each class, you are encouraged to have the readings printed out and bring a pen/pencil and paper to take notes by hand. I will allow the use of laptops during the lecture for those who wish to follow along with the lecture slides. If you do decide to use your device, I ask that you please avoid distractions (texting, playing games, taking selfies, etc). If your use of tech becomes distracting to me or your peers, I will ask you to put your device away or, in extreme or repeated cases, I will ask you to leave the classroom. No tech will be allowed during group conferences, though exceptions will be made for educational purposes only, such as interactive activities, consultation of personal notes during presentations, etc., with devices otherwise silenced and stored away when not in use. Exceptions will also be granted in the case where a student has obtained reasonable accommodations from the Office of Access and Disability Services.

The school (and by extension, I) takes matters of academic integrity very seriously. This means, no matter what source you use, that you are quoting directly or paraphrasing (summarizing) the information from your own words, and citing it correctly (in our case, using APA formatting). Please refer to the school's academic integrity policies for more information. When in doubt about whether you are adhering to the policy, cite your sources!!, get in touch with me, or set up a meeting with someone in the writing center. There is also no excuse for committing acts of plagiarism or falsification. Nor is it okay to copy another person's work and take credit for it.

Failure to do so according to the guidelines linked above will result in contact with the Dean of Studies office and an automatic 'zero' on the assignment.

Writing notes out by hand has been shown to facilitate learning by improving information retention (article). While you may use your electronic device to take notes and access the readings, please do not multitask in class!

APA manual American Psychological Association (2009). Publication manual, (7 th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.

A copy of the APA manual is available in the Reference section of Esther Raushenbush Library. However, for our purposes, the following link should provide you with sufficient information in order to correctly format your papers and cite the work of others. <https://apastyle.apa.org/>

COURSE SCHEDULE

Projected Schedule/Course Outline

Week 1: The Racial Origins of Fat Phobia

Required reading:

- Strings, S. (2019). *Fearing the black body: The racial origins of fat phobia*. NYU Press.
- Kendall, M. (2020). Black girls don't get eating disorders. *Hood feminism: Notes from the women that a movement forgot* (pp. 113 - 126). Viking.
- Quiring, A. (2022). Going with the gut: Fatness and erotic knowledge in Black feminist theories of the body. *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly*, 50(1-2), 86-102.
<https://doi.org/10.1353/wsqr.2022.0006>
- Harrison, D. L. (2021). *Belly of the beast: The politics of anti-fatness as anti-blackness*. North Atlantic Books.
- Aviv, Rachel. *Strangers to Ourselves*

Class Introductions:

- Where are you from in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, religion, sexual orientation, and physical / mental ability?
- What are some of the strengths and challenges about growing up with these social identities?
- What aspects of this social identity are most important to you right now?
- How will you use what you have learned to advance social justice for people struggling with eating disorders?

In groups:

- Why is fat phobia rooted in anti-Blackness?
- What is the relationship between racism and eating disorders?
- What were your most important takeaways from Strings?

Week 2: Ecowomanism

Required reading:

- Harris, M. L. (2017). *Ecowomanism: African American women and earth-honoring faiths*. Orbis Books.
- Miles, T. (2022). *Wild girls: How the outdoors shaped the women who challenged a nation*. W. W. Norton & Company.

Week 3: Feminism And Eating Disorders

Required reading:

- Orbach, S. (2016). *Fat is a feminist issue*. Arrow Books.

Week 4: Eating Disorders as a social justice issue

Required reading:

- Thompson, B. (1994). *A hunger so wide and so deep: A multiracial view of women's eating problems*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Adichie, C. N. (2009, July). *The danger of a single story* [Video]. TED Conferences. https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?subtitle=en

Week 5: Womanism

Required reading:

- hooks, b. (2014). *Feminist theory: From margin to center*. Routledge.
- Nash, J. C. (2019). *Black feminism reimaged: After intersectionality*. Duke University Press.

Week 6: Disability Justice and Eds

Required reading:

- Morales, A. L. (2019). *Kindling: Writings on the body*. Cambridge University Press.
- Gangloff, T. (2025). *Chronic illness and eating disorders: Assessment, clinical skills, and lived experiences* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003500254>

Discussion:

- Why might disability justice be important in eating disorder treatment? How do we apply Morales's concepts to eating disorder treatment?
- What disabilities might co-occur with eating disorders?

Guest Speaker: Jen Chess, LCSW

Week 7: The Medical Complications of Eating Disorders

Required reading:

- Gaudiani, J. L. (2018). *Sick enough: A guide to the medical complications of eating disorders*. Routledge.
- Guest Speaker: Dr. Sarah Lowenthal, psychiatrist and primary care physician whose specialty is eating disorders

Week 8: Health At Every Size

Required reading:

- Bacon, L. (2010). *Health at every size: The surprising truth about your weight*. BenBella Books.
- Guest Speaker: Carol Normandi, MFT, Clinical director of Amrita Eating Disorder Treatment Center

Week 9: Body Trust

Required reading:

- Kinavey, H., & Sturtevant, D. (2019). *Body trust: A revolutionary guide to letting go of food and body shame*. Harmony Books.

Watch:

- neezz. (2022, January 16). *Kat 'Love Yourself' scene | Euphoria Season 2 clip S02E02* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tUpYdoJEIBg>

Week 10: Anorexia

Required reading:

- Berg, J. W. (2019). *Informed consent: Legal theory and clinical practice* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Autonomy, Consent, and The Law
- Fasting Girls, The History of Anorexia Nervosa
- Engelhart, K. (2024, January 3). Palliative psychiatry. *The New York Times Magazine*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/01/03/magazine/palliative-psychiatry.html>

Watch:

- Fargeat, C. (Director). (2024). *The substance* [Film]. Working Title Films.

Class Discussion:

- What are the bioethical dilemmas that you observe in the palliative care article?
- Apply concepts related to beneficence, nonmaleficence, and autonomy in treatment, specifically in relation to informed consent.
- Discuss what it means to participate voluntarily in treatment and to make autonomous decisions. --Discuss issues related to client rights. Discuss anorexia in relation to ethical and legal issues.

In groups:

- Discuss the film and how anorexia relates to the film.
- Why might the film be relevant to what we are learning about.

Week 11: Radical Dharma and Social Justice Issues

Required reading:

- Williams, A. K., Owens, R., & Syedullah, J. (2016). *Radical dharma: Talking race, love, and liberation*. North Atlantic Books.
- All Saints Church Pasadena. (2019, February 9). *Unlearning the ways of the system* [Video]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IC-CxqTGxjk>

Discussion

- What concepts stand out in the Radical Dharma text? How do we apply these concepts to eating disorder treatment, specifically in the context of social justice issues?
- How do we unlearn the ways of the system... relate your ideas back to Angel Kyodo Williams' talk?

Week 12: Gender and the LGBTQ+ Community and Eating Disorders

Required reading:

- Chang, S. C., Singh, A. A., & dickey, I. m. (2018). *A clinician's guide to gender-affirming care: Working with transgender and gender nonconforming clients*. New Harbinger Publications.
- Atkins, D. (Ed.). (1998). *Looking queer: Body image and identity in lesbian, bisexual, gay, and transgender communities*. Harrington Park Press.
- Winterson, J. (2021) *12 bytes*. “Fuck the binary” chapter. Grove Press.

Watch:

- Livingston, J. (Director). (1990). *Paris is burning* [Film]. Miramax Films.

Discussion:

-Applying Sand Chang’s material and concepts from the book, what are best practices for providing gender affirming care to people with eating disorders?

-How is the film related to providing gender affirming care in the context of eating disorder treatment.?

Week 13: Body Liberation

Required reading:

- Ellis-Ordway, N., & Osborn, T. (2025). *Weight and wisdom: Reflection on working for decades on body liberation*. Pearlsong Press.
- Art: “Trans forming liberty” Amy Sherald

Discussion:

What does body liberation mean in terms of eating disorder practice?

Week 14:

Required reading:

- Elkin, L. (2023). *Art monsters: Unruly bodies in feminist art* (1st American ed.). Publisher.

Final class and reflection; pick a piece of artwork on bodies that represents what you have learned in this class and come to class prepared to share and discuss why you chose it. I also encourage you to go to the museums in NYC to view art and pick something that speaks to you.

Resources

- Fighting Eating Disorders in Underrepresented Populations <https://fedupcollective.org>
- The Body Is Not An Apology www.thebodyisnotanapology.tumblr.com
- About-Face www.about-face.org
- Nalgona Positivity Pride- <https://www.nalgonapositivitypride.com>
- Adios Barbie <http://www.adiosbarbie.com/>
- Thick Dumpling Skin <http://www.thickdumplingskin.com/>
- Be Nourished <https://benourished.org/>
- Queer Body Love <https://www.elizabethjcooper.com>
- Dances with Fat <https://danceswithfat.wordpress.com>
- Jess Baker Militant Baker <http://www.themilitantbaker.com>
- Marilyn Wann- Fat!so? <http://www.fatso.com>
- Ifasina (TaMeicka) Clear Young Women's Freedom Center <https://www.youngwomenfree.org/>
- Virgie Tovar <http://www.virgietovar.com>
- Christy Harrison, MPH, RD, CDN- Food Psych Podcast <https://christyharrison.com/foodpsych/>
- Sand Chang, PhD <http://sandchang.com/>
- SJ Thompson <https://www.resilientfatgoddess.com>
- Maintenance Phase – <https://www.maintenancephase.com>
- Dietitians Unplugged – <https://dietitiansunplugged.libsyn.com>
- Caleb Luna – <https://www.caleb-luna.com>
- Aubrey Gordon – <https://www.yourfatfriend.com/home/book>
- National Queer & Trans Therapists of Color Network <https://www.nqttcn.com>
- Association of Size Diversity and Health <https://www.sizediversityandhealth.org>
- Health at Every Size <http://haescommunity.com>
- Project Heal <https://www.theprojectheal.org>
- Eating Disorders Resource Center <https://edrcsv.org/>
- Academy of Eating Disorders www.aedweb.org/
- Eating Disorders Recovery and Support <http://edrs.net>
- National Alliance for Eating Disorders <https://finedhelp.com>

- Equip Eating Disorders <https://equip.health>
- HAES Health sheets- weight -neutral, evidence-based care options for common health conditions: <https://haeshealthsheets.com/>
- Fat Census: analytical tool created to ask fat people about their experiences for data on fatphobia through an intersectional lens: <https://www.freefigure.org>
- Anti-diet, fat positive HAES website with some free and low-cost meal planning handouts: www.platebyplateapproach.com