

## READING GROUP GUIDE

### YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO REMAIN FAT by Virgie Tovar

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1. There is an increasing visibility of fat bodies in popular culture, from Fat Amy in *Pitch Perfect*, to Roxane Gay's memoir *Hunger*, to the TLC show *My Big Fat Fabulous Life*, to Kate in the NBC show *This Is Us*. Does the increased visibility of fatness promote a cultural acceptance of fat bodies? Does it feed into existing fatphobic or misogynistic societal ideals?
2. When Virgie was eleven, she embarked on a summer of extreme dieting that ended with her doctor congratulating her on her weight loss without questioning how she did it. This set the stage for nearly twenty years of disordered eating.
  - a. How does society reinforce this idea that extreme dieting in the pursuit of weight loss is not only healthy but a good idea for fat women?
  - b. What role does the internet, especially with hashtags like #proana and #thin-spo, play in contributing to this mindset that anything goes when it comes to weight loss?
3. Virgie argues that though the buzzwords have changed, the messages about dieting have not (23). Can you identify any practices in your own life that are coded as "taking care of your health" but actually concern weight? Can you identify any other practices coded as "healthy" that are oppressive?
4. Virgie asserts that women are systematically taught not to trust their own instincts or experiences, including when their bodies feel hunger (56). When was the first time you were told that you were tricking yourself into thinking you were hungry? How does being encouraged to question your instincts regarding your body impact other facets of your health (for example, painful menstrual periods that are glossed over by a doctor)?
5. Virgie argues that what our society eroticizes is not thinness but a culture of female submission (72). Think about advertisements showing a "sexy" woman. What about the advertisement makes her sexy?
6. Virgie describes fat activism as strongly "anti-assimilationist," meaning that the movement has no desire to be accepted by a patriarchal system that dehumanizes fat bodies. On the other hand, she describes the body positivity movement as much more open to assimilation (93). What differences does she identify between the movements that might cause this distinction? Do you agree or disagree with her assessment?

7. Virgie describes the 2012 Strong4Life campaign against childhood obesity, a series of billboard ads that went up in Atlanta (76). How does the association between childhood obesity and buffets showcase deeper issues of class? How does it reveal cultural judgments passed on both weight and socioeconomic status?
8. When examining the Strong4Life anti-childhood obesity ad focused on a young overweight white girl (80), Virgie reveals about how her size as a child placed her in the role of the boy in her friends' games. How are notions of weight tied to ideals of masculinity and femininity for both men and women?
9. It is a scientific fact that dieting does not lead to long-term or healthy weight loss (28). However, it is ingrained in popular culture that dieting will lead to happiness—Virgie rejects this notion and focuses instead on freedom. Look at the list of questions she asks on pages 116–117; what are your answers?
10. The book begins and ends with Virgie naked, jigging, and comfortable with her body. How does recapturing her childhood view of her body reflect her journey through diet culture and activism?

**VIRGIE TOVAR** is an author, activist, and one of the nation's leading experts on fat discrimination and body image. She is the editor of the anthology *Hot & Heavy: Fierce Fat Girls on Life, Love & Fashion*.

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For review copy requests or to arrange for an interview, contact Jisu Kim at [jisu@feministpress.org](mailto:jisu@feministpress.org)