

REPORT

In New York, yoga far from heavy eyes

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May 31, 2018 at 20:26



Angela, a yoga teacher in Manatthan, helps one of her students perform the inversion stance.
Photo Sara Naomi Lewkowicz

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In the American city, a class is dedicated to big women so that they can do the exercises at their own pace and feel at ease.

On the Parma walls, there are these famous *motivational quotes* : *"Be what you love"*, *"Always think that something wonderful is going to happen soon"*. Soft music, smells of citrus essential oils, a dozen Mexican floor mats and blankets on both sides of the room: the "Thick and Fit" yoga class begins. this Wednesday night, on the eighth floor of a building in the heart of Manhattan. *"Today we are going to work on inversion postures,"* says yoga teacher Angela. *"If you do not feel able, no problem. You have the strength, but your brain may not know it yet."* In front of her, a dozen women of all ages, black in majority, plump or of strong corpulence, took place on the carpets.

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In the most populous city of the United States, there are also belly dance classes, hip-hop classes, speaking circles, therapeutic centers or many clothing shops that are specifically designed for overweight people. The yoga class "Thick and Fit" is in

line with the American movement Fat Acceptance ("the acceptance of the big") [Lean](#)

its variant, the "Size Acceptance", the tolerance vis-à-vis all, whatever their waist. And which aims to allow everyone to flourish, to be good in his body, to remain active, without promoting diets. They are experiencing a failure rate in 95% of cases, says the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance (Naafa). This pioneering organization against grossophobia, founded in New York in 1969, "*When I go to see the doctor because I have a cold, the only thing he finds to tell me is that I have to lose 30 pounds,*" says the founder of Curve Appeal, She Swoope, who organizes among other things this yoga class.

In the United States, 40% of the adult population is obese, the highest rate in OECD countries and steadily increasing. In New York, if the curve is much lower, it follows the same trend: there were 25.5% obese in 2017, against 9.3% in 1990. In the country, fat bodies are much more visible than 'in Europe: celebrities who assume their forms, vitality of the big-size brands, supermodels 'plus size' put forward, reality TV programs that promote *body positivity* ...

"Second zone"

She Swoope, fashion designer training, pouting. "*For me, all that is gadgets, marketing arguments. What these brands and models show is the "big acceptable", sizes 42 or 44 ... It is important to talk about self-acceptance, but I would like the speech to be much more political. When you're fat, you're a second-class citizen, you're never good enough for society. And I'm not just a black woman, I'm a big black woman*" - in the United States, four out of five African-Americans are overweight or obese. But living in New York, where people are "*much more open*" than in her native Mississippi, has helped her a lot. Internet too: forums and social networks galvanized it. "*For years, I covered my arms and legs, even in the middle of summer, and sweated like crazy. But for some time I decided to fuck it. I say to myself, " Fuck it, I have the right to eat in public Fuck it, I have the right to wear shorts."*

"Mutual"

Before arriving in this yoga class in September, Carsianny, 32, tested others. "*But I felt judged: I had the impression that the appearance counted more than the exercise itself*, regrets the girl. *I have always been told that I can never do*

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anything with my body. ^{more...(/cgvu/#donnees-personnelles)} This space, where I feel safe, shows me that it is false. Here, we share the same fears. I made very good friends, we are a beautiful community." She Swoope even speaks of an "underground culture" to describe this movement. "There is a lot of support: for example, we circulate the list of doctors who are fat friendly, confirms Marlene Mouttet, who has been a Naafa activist for over twenty years, met the day before at her lunch break. We're definitely part of a marginalized group, like, say, transgender or Latinos."

Le cours se déroule comme une séance de yoga traditionnel, avec des enchaînements de postures. On voit des sourires, des ventres, des courbes, des fesses. Des femmes de Botero, en brassière et collants lycra, font la montagne, la chaise, le chien tête en bas, le guerrier ou l'enfant. Les gestes sont peut-être un peu plus lents et l'institutrice plus encourageante. «Yes girl !» «Tu y es presque !» Une jeune femme tente la posture d'inversion, guidée par une autre - tête en bas, jambes contre le mur. «Comment t'as fait ça ?» demande l'une, impressionnée. «Avec ton aide !» lui répond-elle en riant. «Avoir de la force et dépasser sa peur : c'est ça, le truc avec l'inversion», ponctue Angela. Qui conclut la séance : "Thank you for sharing your beautiful energy in this room, remember that you are strong, and thank your body."

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