

Ideologies and Narratives in Relation to 'Fat' Children – Bullies & Victims

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Two Sides to the Coin:

- ▶ Childhood obesity as a recurrent theme in the scientific literature, as well as in the (British) media.
 - ▶ Concern for the trend in childhood obesity is reflected in public policy and pedagogy in the UK, with a specific focus on improving healthy eating practices (DfE, 2012; 2015).
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Childhood Obesity, Morality and Body-bullying

- ▶ Ideologies of health which circulate in schools and society can impact negatively on children's embodied consciousness (Rich, 2010).

And there is evidence that>>>


- ▶ 'Fat bodies' are culturally represented as inferior, deficient, and ugly, with 'fat' children subjected to greater prejudice, teasing and bullying than other children (see also Lupton, 2011, Thornberg, 2013).



What if
Snow White
was no longer
beautiful
and the
7 Dwarfs
not so short?

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- ▶ Body-bullying, it could be argued, to some extent results from experiences where bodies have been subject to stigmas inside and outside of school contexts.
 - ▶ *This poses the question of whether and how the ideas that are the product of political health ideologies enter the ordinary life of the lived ideology.*
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Current Study

- ▶ Ideologies and narratives around ‘fatness’, drawing on a two-level ‘synthesized’ discourse analysis (Sims-Schouten and Riley, 2014; Wetherell, 1998) as a methodological framework.

1) Discursive Psychology (concerned with what people do with their talk, e.g. disclaiming and making extreme statements – link with CA).

2) Wider discourses that participants draw on to make sense of themselves, including common sense discourses and ideologies.

Data is transcribed in detail, drawing on Jefferson (1985)

Participants

- ▶ 56 participants were in twelve focus groups, between 4–7 in each group;

Four were with young people (mean age = 14 years old);

Two were with secondary school teachers;

Two with early years practitioners;

Four with parents

Examples of Talk

- ▶ W1: >Yeah, cause I mean< err there's a fat boy at sch↓ool, but..... (*Teacher focus group*)
- ▶ B1: C↓os ↓I::, >I'm a midget< y↓eah. And I'm, and I, so this kid tried b↓ullying me, and I >he's a fat shit<..... (*Young people focus group*)

Examples Continued


- ▶ W1: I thi::nk .hh er, what I've noticed >usually, but not always< (1.0), usua::lly its the bigger children, >like in size<, they tend to be more er aggressive..... (*Early years practitioners*)
- ▶ W2: Like we were walking, err (1.0) a::nd >E, she is only three< she s↓aid m↑ummy that is a fat p↑erson, and I was like, no E, you cant s↑ay th↓at (1.0)..... (*Parents*)


Example – Early Childhood

The girls, the girls .hh seem bl↓ind to >a]ny sort of< Erm (2.0) skin c↓olour, erm (1.0) imp↓ediment and....

I was t↑alking to one of the m↓ums and h::er little girl is a b↓it bigger, a:nd, she'd erm (2.0) told, you know, came home and >told the mum that she'd been called f↑at< or ◦somebody called her a fat some(1.0)◦ something or (1.0) and ◦mum was saying◦ (1.0) mum went straight in th↑ere and said, you know, we do not use that word in this h↓ouse and (1.0) I mean, if I said, if the g↑irls (2.0) if someone called my girls 'fat' they'd just go 'I am not fat', and just walk aw↑ay from ↓it (1.0). But I think because the mum th↓en (2.0) came in and m↓ade it an ↑issue .hh it was something then that the little girl was more s↑ensitive ↓of and .hh it:

Analysis and Conclusions

- ▶ There is a sense that the current increased focus on childhood obesity and ‘fatness’ has found its way into the narratives and ideologies in relation to bullying.
 - ▶ ‘Fatness’ is being made an issue, by labelling the ‘fat kid’ and ‘bigger children’, and by hinting at ‘fatness’ as a deficiency and problematic in our current society.
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- ▶ Thus, obesity and fatness, as abnormalities, are now included in common sense talk in relation to 'easy targets', victims and bullies.
 - ▶ A number of strategies were adopted in the extracts in this paper, which appeared to specifically center around 'otherness', as a way of distancing oneself from 'fatness' and 'fat' people
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It should be noted that although our point is that stigmatising the person with weight issues is not the solution, there will be points where it is in the child's best interests to intervene in order to prevent later acute health problems.

Yet, any solution that we consider must take account of the complex interacting social factors that contribute to one particular child's body size.

References

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- ▶ **Website:** www.micehub.port.ac.uk