Weight Bias: Recognizing its Influence on Addressing the Obesity Epidemic

Presented by
Tonya C. Price, DHEd(c), MS, RDN, CHES

From
University of Lynchburg
Lynchburg, VA
Objectives

1. Identify ways in which weight bias and size-based discrimination occur even among well-intentioned health promoting individuals and organizations.

1. Critically evaluate how health messaging can perpetuate microaggressions towards those who are dealing with obesity, including youth.

1. Originate inclusive and empowering health messages that motivate all individuals to live a healthy lifestyle.
Weight-Bias

- Definition -

“negative weight-related attitudes and beliefs that are manifested by stereotypes, rejection and prejudice towards individuals because they are overweight or obese”

(Puhl, Moss-Racusin, Schwartz, and Brownell, 2008, p. 347)
Prevalence

- 69% of overweight and obese women experience weight bias (Puhl & Brownell, 2006)

- Not isolated to the US - Canada, Australia, and most developed countries

- Increase in weight stigma from 7% (1995-1996) to 12% (2004-2006) - National Survey of MIDUS

- Given the forecasted growth of obesity - risk for weight discrimination will also increase
Influence of Weight Bias

- Media (Gapinski, Schwartz, & Brownell, 2006)
- Education (Fontana, Furtado, Mazzardo, Hong, & de Campos, 2017; Puhl, Luedicke, & Heuer, 2011)
- Workplace (Carr & Friedman, 2005)
- Healthcare (Baker et al., 2017)
- Friends and Family (Pont, Puhl, Cook, & Slusser, 2014)
What does Weight-Bias look like?

Share your thoughts...

- Person to person
- Teacher to student
- Healthcare professional to patient
- Boss to employee
- Coach to athlete
Weight Management Guide for Overweight Children

By Vincent Iannelli, MD | Medically reviewed by a board-certified physician
Updated March 20, 2019

Article Table of Contents

Your First Goal
Finding Motivation
Behaviors to Modify
Calories and Serving Sizes

Encourage Fitness
Be a Good Role Model
Protect Self Esteem
Important Reminders

An increasing number of kids are overweight, and if no intervention is made, 80% of them will stay overweight as adults. This can put them at risk for many medical problems, including diabetes, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and sleep apnea. Obesity can also adversely affect their self-esteem.

While most children should not be put on a
Childhood obesity: The Singapore fat camps where children are shamed for being overweight

By Herlyn Kaur
Posted 11 Apr 2018, 2:08am

In the fight against obesity, government-sponsored fat camps that shame young children into losing weight seem like an extreme approach to public health.

But that is exactly what Singapore has done, and the results speak for themselves — with a

Related Story: Kids need three hours of exercise a day, but two-thirds are missing out
Related Story: Should I let my kids drink fruit juice?
Related Story: Is our obsession with infant growth charts fueling childhood obesity?
Related Story: Fat nation. The politics of obesity in Australia
Weight Bias at Home and at School

https://youtu.be/bCJe42LGnB4
Ramifications of Weight Bias

- Decline in emotional well-being (anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, suicidal behaviors)
- Unhealthy behaviors that worsen obesity
- Development of an eating disorder
- Avoidance of physical activity
- Avoidance of medical care
- Social isolation
- Strained social relationships

Pont, Puhl, Cook, & Slusser, 2014
Stigma Experienced by Children and Adolescents with Obesity

Society believes weight stigma and shame can motivate people to lose weight. But, weight stigma is harmful to both emotional and physical health.

Health Consequences of Weight Stigma

- Decreased Exercise and Physical Activity
- Social Isolation and Academic Outcomes
- Unhealthy Eating Behaviors
- Worsening Obesity
- Emotional and Psychological Effects

1 in 3 Children and adolescents in the USA have overweight or obesity

Although pediatricians focus their efforts on improving weight-related health of youth, there should also be a focus on weight stigma.

The American Academy of Pediatrics Section on Obesity and The Obesity Society offers the following recommendations for pediatricians to address weight stigma in different settings.

Improving Clinical Practice

1. Be a role model - share best practices for nonbiased behaviors.
2. Use an empathetic approach for clinical documentation.
3. Use patient-centered empowering counseling techniques.
4. Create a supportive clinical environment.
5. Perform behavioral health screening.

Advocate Against Weight Stigma

1. Schools
   - Promote antibullying policies to protect vulnerable students.
2. Youth-Targeted Media
   - Portray individuals with obesity responsibly and respectfully.
3. Provider Training
   - Address weight stigma in ongoing training and education for medical students, residents, and practicing physicians.
4. Parents
   - Empower families and patients to manage and address weight-related health issues in schools, communities, and homes.


Link: pediatrics.org/content/140/6/e20173034

Copyright © 2018 American Academy of Pediatrics

American Academy of Pediatrics

Lynnhburg
Health Message Practices that Backfire

• Before and after pictures - (Geier, Schwartz, & Brownell, 2003)

• Shock-tactics - (Puhl, 2014)

• Excessive focus on the word “obesity” - (Puhl, 2014)
Georgia Children’s Health Alliance & Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta (2012)
Guidelines for Media Portrayals of Individuals Affected by Obesity

Respect diversity and avoid stereotypes

• Avoid portrayals for humor or ridicule
• Avoid weight-based stereotypes
• Present persons in a diverse manner
• Present persons who have professions, expertise, authority, and skills
• Do not make the focus on weight

Source: Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity, The Obesity Society (TOS), The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC), Obesity Medicine Association (OMA), and American Society for Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery (ASMBS)
Guidelines for Media Portrayals of Individuals Affected by Obesity

Appropriate language and terminology

- Consider if the language could be offensive
  - Does the language use adjectives or adverbs of contempt
  - Does the language imply moral judgements and character flaws
- Use People-First Language for Obesity - putting individuals before the disability or disease
  - “There are many obese and overweight people”
  - “There are many people affected by obesity”

Source: Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity, The Obesity Society (TOS), The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC), Obesity Medicine Association (OMA), and American Society for Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery (ASMBS)
Guidelines for Media Portrayals of Individuals Affected by Obesity

Balanced and accurate coverage of obesity

- Is the message grounded in scientific findings and evidence-based research?
- Recognize that the causes of obesity are complex
  - Environmental, biological, genetic, social and individual factors
- Recognize the multidimensional approaches and solutions to obesity
  - Behavioral, surgical, pharmaceutical

Source: Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity, The Obesity Society (TOS), The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC), Obesity Medicine Association (OMA), and American Society for Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery (ASMBS)
Guidelines for Media Portrayals of Individuals Affected by Obesity

Appropriate pictures and images of individuals affected by obesity

• Is the emphasis on weight or isolate body parts?
• Do the images depersonalize and stigmatize?
• Are the individuals engaged in stereotypical behaviors?
• Are the individuals routinely shown as disheveled or inappropriately dressed?

Source: Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity, The Obesity Society (TOS), The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC), Obesity Medicine Association (OMA), and American Society for Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery (ASMBS)
Positive, Motivating Messages

- Emphasize strength and health-not appearance (Engeln, Shavlik, & Daly, 2018)

- Encourage a growth mindset - skill over winning (Carol Dweck, Stanford University)

- Convey unconditional support - not critiques
YOU CAN HELP
STOP CHILDHOOD OBESITY

https://www.upmcmyhealthmatters.com/you-can-help-stop-childhood-obesity/
Shifts in the Research

• Shifts in the Research
  – Less on demonstrating that weight bias occurs
  – More on testing training and interventional practices to reduce weight bias

• Shifts in Policy
  – Federal Policy change - Weight bias is an accepted form of prejudice without federal law to stop its perpetuation.
  – State Policy change - Michigan
    (https://www.michigan.gov/mdcr/0,4613,7-138-4954_4997-16288--00.html)
"You must be the change you wish to see in the world."
-Gandhi


References


Thank You

Tonya Carter Price, DHEd(c), MS, RDN, CHES

price.t@lynchburg.edu

Assistant Professor, Health Promotion &
Master of Public Health
Department Chair/Program Director, Health Promotion
University of Lynchburg