Internalized weight bias: How does it affect healthy behaviors?

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Canadian Obesity Summit, 2019
Disclosures

Personal bias
- I have not lived with obesity
- I believe weight bias is harmful & I believe in evidence-based science to help reduce weight bias, stigma & discrimination in society

Funding
- Concordia University, Montreal
- Fonds de Recherche du Québec-Santé (Chercheur Boursier- Junior 1 Award)
- MITACS & Dairy Farmers of Canada Accelerate grant
Weight bias prevalence

Weight bias and discrimination is rampant in our schools, workplaces, health systems and media.

The problem is widespread:

- **63%** Elementary school kids with obesity face a 63% higher chance of being bullied
- **54%** of adults with obesity report being stigmatized by coworkers
- **69%** of adults with obesity report experiences with weight bias from a health care professional
- **72%** of images and 77% of videos stigmatized obese persons according to recent media studies
Weight bias internalization

- Self-stigma
- Applying stereotypes to ourselves
- Belief that the stigma is deserved

Pearl & Puhl, 2018
I hate myself for my weight.

I feel anxious about my weight because of what people might think of me.

I am less attractive than most other people because of my weight.

Whenever I think a lot about my weight, I feel depressed.

Weight Bias Internalization Scale (WBIS)

Durso & Latner, 2008
Health consequences of weight bias

![Diagram showing the relationship between weight stigma and various health outcomes.](image)
Published studies: WBI & health

Pearl & Puhl, 2018
Weight bias internalization & health

Weight Bias/Health

Weight bias internalization and health: a systematic review

R. L. Pearl¹ and R. M. Puhl²

Obesity Reviews 19, 1141–1163, August 2018
Weight bias internalization & mental health

Higher WBI scores associated with:

• ↑ depression & anxiety
• ↑ negative emotions
• ↑ eating disorder symptoms, binge eating
• ↓ self-esteem
• ↓ quality of life

Pearl & Puhl, 2018
Weight bias internalization & physical health

Higher WBI scores associated with:

- ↓ overall physical activity
- ↓ enjoyment of physical activity
- ↓ exercise motivation
- ↑ resting heart rate
- ↑ metabolic syndrome

Pearl & Puhl, 2018
Weight bias internalization: Impact on physical activity

Vartanian et al. 2011
Weight bias internalization: Impact on physical activity

Pearl et al. 2015
Study limitations

Most published studies to date:

- Women
- Caucasian
- Cross-sectional (75.7%)

Pearl & Puhl, 2018
New research

PERFORM Center, Concordia University
N=175

- 51.42% women
- Mean age = 45.45 ± 16.95
- BMI = 26.67 ± 5.49 kg/m²

Szwimer, Marchione, Kakinami & Alberga (unpublished data, manuscript in preparation)
New research: mental health

For every unit increase in mean WBI...

- Life satisfaction, positive emotions and body satisfaction decreased (p<0.001)

By sex, for every unit increase in mean WBI...

- Life satisfaction, positive emotions and body satisfaction decreased in females (p<0.01)
- Only life satisfaction & body satisfaction decreased in males

Szwimer, Marchione, Kakinami & Alberga (unpublished data, manuscript in preparation)
Future research directions

Physical health

- Sedentary behaviour *
- Pre & post bariatric surgery
- Sex differences
- Ethnic, cultural differences
- Coping strategies
- Interventions
- Longitudinal studies *
Let’s check-in with ourselves

- Self-reflection, discuss & challenge weight stereotypes
- Weight Implicit Association Test (IAT): [https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/](https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/)
Practical suggestions

- Avoid making assumptions
- Assess weight bias internalization among ourselves & our clients/ patients
  - Weight Bias Internalization Scale (Durso & Latner, 2008)
    - WBIS- Modified- for varying weight statuses
  - Weight Self-Stigma Questionnaire (Lillis et al. 2010)
Advocacy

Overcoming Weight Bias
Do you have it in you?

Weight Bias: refers to negative attitudes toward others because of their weight.

Weight Stigma: refers to stereotypes and labels we assign to people who have obesity.

Weight Discrimination: refers to actions against people who have obesity that can cause social exclusion and inequities.
Thank you

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