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Weight Bias as a Social Justice Issue: A Call for Dialogue

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Abstract

Weight bias is pervasive, impacting the lived experiences of individuals with large bodies in all areas of society. Weight bias negatively impacts psychological and physical health, and contributes to systemic inequity for individuals with large bodies. Given that counselling psychology has been recognized for its commitment to social justice, it is important to provide examples of the many social justice issues associated with weight bias. The purpose of this paper is to position weight bias as an important social justice issue for psychologists, through the lens of three social justice perspectives; distributive justice, procedural justice, and ecological justice. We examine the lack of equitable distribution of opportunities and resources for individuals with large bodies in health care, the workforce, education, and within interpersonal relationships. We also discuss the lack of voice provided to individuals with large bodies with regard to the policies and practices that affect them, and the social and environmental forces that systemically influence body weight and weight bias. Finally, we encourage further dialogue between professionals across disciplines about weight bias as a social justice issue in the future design of research, education, and practice.

Keywords: Weight Bias; Social Justice; Counselling Psychology; Intersectionality

Weight Bias as a Social Justice Issue: A Call for Dialogue

In recent decades, researchers have documented the pervasiveness and the strength of negative attitudes and beliefs towards individuals with large bodies¹, also known as weight bias (e.g., Mussap, Manger, & Gold, 2016; Vartanian et al., 2016). Weight bias has been defined as the devaluation of large bodies in society, which leads to negative attitudes, beliefs, and stereotypes (Brewis, 2014; Brownell, 2005; Puhl & Heuer, 2009). Weight bias has also been described as a socially acceptable form of discrimination (Puhl & Brownell, 2001). Carels and Latner (2016) described weight bias as encompassing multiple forms, including: (1) negative attitudes (e.g., discomfort or dislike directed towards with individuals with large bodies), (2) preconceived judgments or stereotypes (e.g., lazy, unmotivated, unattractive), (3) verbal assault (e.g., teasing, weight-based jokes), (4) physical assault (e.g., hitting, pushing), and (5) physical barriers (e.g., narrow chairs). In an examination of the prevalence of weight bias among the general population between 1995 and 2006, Andreyeva, Puhl, and Brownell (2008) found that weight bias had increased 66% and was the fourth most frequently reported form of discrimination. Findings from a recent cross-sectional study also suggested that weight bias increased among researchers and professionals specializing in obesity and weight-related health care between 2001 and 2013 (Tomiya et al., 2015).

Researchers have documented the pervasive impact of weight bias on all levels of education (e.g., Kenney, Gortmaker, Davison, & Bryn Austin 2015), the attitudes and behaviours of health care professionals (e.g., Phelan et al., 2015), workplace success (e.g., Giel, Thiel,

¹ Researchers often choose “people with obesity” when referring to weight bias directed towards individuals with a BMI of 30 or greater. Due to tensions in the field regarding language preference for words such as ‘fat’ or ‘obese’ (Cooper, 2010; Saguy & Riley, 2005), we have chosen ‘large bodies’ as an alternative, more neutral, term for the current paper. We have also chosen person first language (i.e., *individuals with large bodies*) with the intent to acknowledge that body size is just one aspect of an individual’s whole identity.

Teufel, Mayer, & Zipfel, 2010), and interpersonal relationships (e.g., Puhl & King, 2013). Further, weight bias is associated with numerous physical and psychological health consequences, including increased stress (Tomiyama et al., 2014), blood pressure (Rosenthal et al., 2015), binge-eating behaviour (Durso et al., 2012), as well as decreased life expectancy (Sutin et al., 2015), decreased motivation to engage in physical activity (Vartanian & Novak, 2011), eating restraint (Jendrzyca & Warschburger, 2016), and poorer self-reported physical and mental health (Pearl, White, & Grilo, 2014). Although researchers have used these results to include weight bias as an important topic within both research and public policy, they have yet to widely and consistently refer to weight bias as a *social justice* issue.

Prior to examining the evidence for weight bias as a social justice issue, it is important to first define social justice, which has been conceptualized from multiple perspectives. For example, Bell (1997) provided an often-cited definition of the goal of social justice as “full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. Social justice includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure” (p. 3). Contemporary definitions within counselling psychology define social justice as promoting equitable distribution of resources and opportunities, full participation of all individuals within society so they are able to achieve their potential, and direct action to decrease the oppression of marginalized populations (Arthur & Collins, 2010; Arthur, Collins, McMahon, & Marshall, 2009). Social justice has been described as both an ideal to be promoted, as well as the active empowerment of individuals and communities (Ginsbeg & Sinacore, 2015).

The purpose of this paper is to invite attention to weight bias as a social justice issue for psychologists. This is important because psychologists may have assumptions about weight or

people with large bodies that may unintentionally impact their work in negative ways. Although we have selected to discuss weight bias as a social justice issue mostly within the scope of counselling psychology, we hope that our discussion will resonate with scholars from other areas of psychology. We provide a descriptive review of weight bias literature through the lens of three social justice perspectives and a close examination of the literature to demonstrate why weight bias is a social justice issue. The connection between the social justice perspectives of distributive justice, procedural justice, and ecological justice will be discussed in relation to weight bias literature in order to provide support for positioning weight bias as a social justice issue. Finally, implications for the education and practice of psychology will be discussed, using Sinacore and Enns' (2005) integrated social justice pedagogy. We hope this paper will encourage further dialogue about weight bias through a social justice lens.

Social Justice in Counselling Psychology

In reflecting upon the history, current state, and future directions of Canadian counselling psychology, scholars acknowledged the value of diversity, social justice, and advocacy in defining the field (Sinacore et al., 2011; Young & Lalande, 2011). Sinacore et al. (2011) acknowledged the contributions of social justice research and advocacy within counselling psychology to the broader field of applied psychology. Young and Lalande (2011) echoed an acknowledgement of these contributions as a “defining moment” in the field, and encouraged the continued discussion of social justice in counselling psychology as a way to push the field “to be more explicit about its values” (p. 252).

In reference to the Canadian context, Ginsberg and Sinacore (2015) stated that social justice can be evaluated by examining the extent to which social inequities have been addressed, resources have been allocated fairly, and individuals have been meaningfully employed and able

to achieve legal justice. Previous scholars have noted the role of social justice advocacy as working towards equity when resources and opportunities are not equally distributed (Fouad, Gerstein, & Toporek, 2006; Ginsberg & Sinacore, 2015). Among other efforts, this work has included promoting multicultural competence, reducing racism, sexism, homophobia, and ageism, influencing the legislative process, and implementing strategies to eliminate human rights abuses (Fouad et al., 2006). Despite the recognized importance of social justice in counselling psychology, it has also been acknowledged that, over time, the extent to which researchers and practitioners have valued social justice has varied (Fouad et al., 2006).

Call for Recommitment to Social Justice in Counselling Psychology

Recently, researchers have called for a recommitment to social justice (e.g., Arthur & Collins, 2010; Kennedy & Arthur, 2014; Sinacore, 2011). Kennedy and Arthur (2014) asserted that social justice needs to be positioned as a central value among all helping professions, including counselling psychology. Such calls for recommitment to social justice were influenced by criticisms of the multiculturalism movement, which noted the lack of consideration to issues such as racism, sexism, economic oppression, and homophobia (e.g., Moodley, 2007). In recognizing this call, Toporek and Vaughn (2010) contended that, in order to ethically and effectively respond to calls for a recommitment to social justice, professional education must include both content and experiences that relate to social justice. In addition, Caldwell and Vera (2010) highlighted the utility of required professional education experiences with marginalized populations in providing powerful opportunities for students to be exposed to multiple forms of injustice and to aid in the development of a social justice lens in their practice.

Researchers have also advocated for a broader social justice orientation that responds to the inequity of all historically oppressed groups (Arthur & Collins, 2015; Sinacore et al., 2011).

Although social justice and multicultural counselling have been described as inseparable (Arthur & Collins, 2015), Ginsberg and Sinacore (2015) stated that counselling psychology's current orientation towards multiculturalism may not be enough and may only account for one part required for a "robust social justice agenda in the discipline" (p. 264). We believe that we need to consider not only persons who have been historically considered marginalized, but that this agenda needs to provide a more expansive examination of socially unjust practices. We argue that weight bias needs to be included in an examination of social practices that leads to inequities and injustices. The lack of acknowledgement of the systemic inequity and oppression of individuals with large bodies is a critical gap in the dialogue about social justice.

Conceptualizing Weight Bias as a Social Justice Issue

Research findings have documented weight bias as a systemic form of oppression within education, health care, relationships, and the workforce (e.g., Puhl & Heuer, 2009). In addition, many researchers have taken up discussion of the broad social discourses that contribute to the persistence of weight bias (e.g., van Amsterdam, 2013). Despite this research history, few scholars and researchers refer to weight bias as a social justice issue (e.g., Puhl & Heuer, 2010; van Amsterdam, 2013). Puhl and Heuer (2010) argued that weight-based shaming and discrimination is a harmful public health strategy, and that, instead, strategies should shift emphasis away from individual responsibility and towards social influences. Van Amsterdam (2013) stated that fat activism was born as a "social justice project" in response to popular social discourses that weight reflects a lifestyle choice, and thus, is an individual responsibility (p. 162). Fat activists recognize that such messages significantly contribute to weight bias, and they work to provide alternative framings of weight and large bodies as well as to critically examine the

role of the media and the patriarchal influences that serve to devalue large bodies (van Amsterdam, 2013).

Finally, discussion of eating disorder and/or obesity prevention as social justice issues has received similarly little attention. It has been suggested that social justice may be the best perspective from which to view weight-related inequity within and between countries (Russell-Mayhew, 2007). It has also been suggested that emphasis needs to shift away from the individual and towards “*changing environments and intentionally creating experiences* that contribute to overall health and wellness (physically, mentally, emotionally, socially, and spiritually) for people of every size” (Russell-Mayhew & Grace, 2016, p. 57). Utilizing social justice perspectives of distributive, procedural, and ecological justice, in this section, we will conceptualize weight bias as a distinct form of oppression to be considered at the intersections of gender, race, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation.

Distributive Justice and Weight Bias

Distributive justice has been defined as the fair and equitable distribution of goods, opportunities, benefits and burdens, and power within society (Prilleltensky, 1997; Vermunt & Tornblum, 2007). Distributive justice needs to be achieved alongside the consideration of the differences in power as well as differences in the ability to express needs experienced by individuals in society (Kenny, Horne, Orpinas, & Reese, 2009). Considering body weight through a distributive justice lens, it follows that individuals with large bodies deserve equitable distribution of goods, power, and opportunities. However, researchers have established that individuals with large bodies experience inequitable distribution with regard to their quality of health care (e.g., Phelan et al., 2015), success in education (e.g., Burmeister, Keifer, Carels, & Musher-Eizenman, 2013), opportunity in employment (e.g., Giel et al., 2012), and the

development of interpersonal relationships (e.g., Palmer & Rutland, 2011). Each of these will be outlined below.

Weight bias in health care. Previous research results have indicated that health care professionals tend to believe that individuals with large bodies are noncompliant, lazy, and lack willpower (Puhl & Brownell, 2001; Puhl, Luedicke, & Grilo, 2014). Negative weight-based attitudes have been reported among nurses (e.g., Brown, 2006), physicians (e.g., Sabin, Marini, & Nosek, 2012), dieticians (e.g., Stone & Werner, 2012), kinesiologists (e.g., Chambliss, Finley, & Blair, 2004), physiotherapists (e.g., Setchell et al., 2014), mental health professionals (e.g., Puhl, Latner, King, & Luedicke, 2014), as well as health professionals in training (e.g., Swift, Hanlon, El-Redy, Puhl, & Glazebrook, 2014). Physicians tend to regard obesity as the individual responsibility of the patient as opposed to a medical problem (Epstein & Ogden, 2005; Sikorski et al, 2013) or social oppression (van Amsterdam, 2013). In addition, among primary care providers, more experienced professionals tend to report greater weight bias (Khandalavala, Rojanala, Geske, Koran-Scholl, & Guck, 2014).

Research evidence connecting the negative attitudes of health care professionals to inequity in the quality of patient care for individuals with large bodies is mounting (Gudzune, Bennett, Cooper, & Bleich, 2014; Phelan et al., 2015). In a critical review of the literature, Phelan et al., (2015) suggested that health care professionals tend to exhibit less patient-centered communication, less respect, and spend less time with patients with large bodies and that they dislike and feel unprepared to treat obesity. In recognizing a lack of effective treatment engagement with patients with large bodies, DiGiacinto, Gildon, Stamile, and Aubrey (2015) concluded that physicians might not be offering patients advice because they feel they have inadequate resources or believe patients will not comply. Researchers examining the perspectives

of patients with large bodies have suggested that perceiving judgment from primary care providers negatively impacted trust in the patient-provider relationship (Gudzune et al., 2014), and that patients have received insensitive comments and gestures from providers (Buxton & Snethen, 2013). Taken together, these results suggest that individuals with large bodies experience an unequal distribution of access to quality health care and are further burdened by negative stereotypes.

Weight bias in education. Research investigating the occurrence of weight bias in education has suggested that, across all levels of education, children, adolescents, and adults with large bodies are impacted by negative perceptions from peers, teachers, and other school professionals (e.g., Puhl & Heuer, 2009). Although limited, previous work has suggested that teachers view students with large bodies as more burdensome (Wilson, Smith, & Wildman, 2015), and that these attitudes impact the perceptions held by teachers in general (e.g., Kenney et al., 2015), as well as physical education teachers in particular (e.g., Greenleaf & Weiller, 2005). Kenney et al. (2015) investigated the relationship between student weight and teacher's perceived academic ability. They suggested that teachers tend to rate female students with large bodies as having lower ability in reading, and male students with large bodies as having lower ability in math. Similarly, in an examination of the attitudes of physical education teachers from primary to high school, researchers have found that teachers tend to believe that children with large bodies have lower physical ability, co-operation, teamwork, interpersonal skills, and reasoning compared to peers (Greenleaf & Weiller, 2005; Peterson, Puhl, & Luedicke, 2012). In addition to the attitudes of teachers, students have reported that frequent weight and gender bullying is a barrier to engaging in physical education classes and extra-curricular physical activities (Bauer, Yang, & Austin, 2004).

These experiences with weight bias carry forward into higher education (e.g., Burmeister et al., 2013). Utilizing a nationally representative sample of approximately 90 000 American high school students, Crosnoe (2007) suggested that female students, but not male students, with large bodies were less likely to enter college. Further, Burmeister et al. (2013) found that, despite no significant differences in letters of recommendation, graduate school applicants with large bodies received significantly fewer offers of acceptance after in-person interviews. These consistent educational discrepancies experienced by individuals with large bodies, especially among females, is troubling given that education is a key element of socioeconomic status, a consistent predictor of overall health and well-being (Stringhini et al., 2010). From the perspective of distributive justice, this discussion of weight bias in education highlights that, across all levels of education, individuals with large bodies experience fewer opportunities and more barriers in education as well as the burden of negative stereotypes.

Weight bias in employment. Within employment settings, individuals with large bodies are stereotypically regarded as having poorer job performance and suitability, poorer reliability, and low intelligence (Giel, Thiel, Teufel, Mayer, & Zipfel, 2010). Longitudinal research findings have suggested that individuals with large bodies experience a significant and persistent wage gap throughout their careers (Baum & Ford, 2004). In addition, approximately 60% of adults experience weight discrimination in their workplace (Puhl, Andreyeva, & Brownell, 2008). In a qualitative review investigating weight bias in employment, Giel et al. (2010) suggested that employees with large bodies experience barriers to obtaining employment, as well as barriers in achieving success and acceptance in the workplace. Results from a recent meta-analysis of experimental and correlation research also suggested that individuals with large bodies

experience more negative work-related outcomes and that women experience greater weight discrimination than men in employment settings (Vanhove & Gordon, 2014).

Weight discrimination has also been documented in hiring decisions. Researchers have found that individuals with large bodies were less likely to be hired (e.g., Giel et al., 2012) and, among individuals who formerly lived with large bodies, those who lost weight through bariatric surgery were viewed less favourably than individuals who had lost weight through lifestyle changes (Carels et al., 2015). Using a sample of human resource professionals, Giel et al. (2012) found that individuals with large bodies were significantly less likely to be selected to be hired and, if hired, were rarely chosen for supervisory or high-prestige positions. Similarly, research conducted by O'Brien, Latner, Ebner, and Hunter (2013) suggested that self-reported weight bias predicted lower employability ratings, starting salaries, and perceived leadership potential within a personnel selection task. Together, these results suggest that individuals with large bodies, especially women, are not provided with the same opportunities for success in the workplace, and that they experience consistent barriers, such as lower wages.

Weight bias and interpersonal relationships. Researchers have examined the influence of weight bias on interpersonal relationships among children (e.g., Palmer & Rutland, 2011), adolescents (e.g., Puhl, Luedicke, & Heuer, 2011), and adults (e.g., Chen & Brown, 2005). In an investigation of friendship preferences of 5-to-11 year old children, Palmer and Rutland (2011) found that most children selected a photo of an underweight child as their preferred friend, and that girls assigned more positive traits to a photo of an underweight child and more negative traits to a photo of an overweight child. Results from research conducted with children also suggested that teachers and peers described children with large bodies as being less accepted, less likely to be a best friend, and more socially withdrawn (Zeller, Reiter-Purtill, & Ramey,

2008). These negative attitudes continue on into adolescence, where, in one study, researchers found that having a large body was perceived to be among the top two most common reasons that peers are victimized (Puhl et al., 2011). In the study, 84% of participants reported having observed students with large bodies being called names, ignored or avoided, excluded from social activities, receiving verbal threats, being physically harassed, and being teased during physical activities (Puhl et al., 2011). Results of research conducted with children and adolescents also suggested that males are more often the perpetrators, and females more often the victims, of weight-based victimization (Griffiths, Wolke, Page, & Horwood, 2006; Puhl et al., 2011).

This gendered nature of weight bias continues into adulthood, where, compared to men with large bodies, women with large bodies are more often regarded as unattractive (e.g., Smith, Schmoll, Konik, & Oberlander, 2007). Much of the research examining weight bias in adult relationships has focused on romantic and sexual relationships. In one study, researchers found that both male and female participants selected an individual with a large body as the least desirable sexual partner, although men ranked women with large bodies as being more undesirable (Chen & Brown, 2005). Further, in an investigation of existing heterosexual relationships, Boyes and Latner (2009) found that, when female partners had large bodies, they were described as less attractive than the ideal by their partner, and both partners rated the relationship as having lower quality. With regard to distributive justice, these results suggest that individuals with large bodies experience greater consequences in interpersonal relationships, with women experiencing greater consequences and less power than men.

Weight bias and distributive *injustice*. Although not an exhaustive review, the distribution of opportunities, resources, and power for individuals with large bodies in health

care, the workforce, education, and within interpersonal relationships is anything but fair and equitable, supporting the position that weight bias is an important social justice issue. In the next section, we discuss procedural justice and the limited voice of individuals with large bodies in the decision-making processes that impact them.

Procedural Justice and Weight Bias

Procedural justice has been defined as the connection of the outcome of distributing goods and opportunities to the process of distributing such goods and opportunities (Fondacaro & Weinberg, 2002; Vermunt & Tornblum, 2007). This occurs by including all stakeholders, including people who are socially oppressed, in the decision making process, thereby increasing the perceived fairness of those involved (Fondacaro & Weinberg, 2002; Vermunt & Tornblum, 2007). Utilizing procedural justice to consider equitable distribution processes for individuals with large bodies, it follows that individuals with large bodies deserve to be involved in the decision making process for the policies and practices that will affect them. Unfortunately, their involvement in decision-making to guide research, policy, and practice, is rarely incorporated..

Procedural justice and the voices of individuals with large bodies. Results from a previous meta-analysis examining the involvement of patients in the planning and development of health care suggested that the involvement of patients positively contributed to changes in service delivery (Crawford et al., 2002). Researchers who have examined the perspectives of individuals with large bodies in research have centered on weight loss and obesity-related interventions. For example, researchers have utilized the lived experiences of individuals with large bodies in order to improve health care with regard to prevention and intervention (e.g., Schalkwijk et al., 2015), but these efforts have not focused on the perspectives of individuals with large bodies on improving access to health care, or service delivery. For example, through

the use of participatory action research, which engages members of the community in the processes of program planning, implementation, and assessment, individuals with large bodies have been involved in obesity prevention programs and community environment intervention (Findholt, Michael, & Davis, 2010; Sirikulchayanonta, Pavadhgul, Chongsuwat, & Klaewkla, 2011). Research conducted in Thailand included the perspectives of children with large bodies, their parents, and teachers throughout the process of a school-based initiative on healthy living (Sirikulchayanonta et al., 2011). Another study conducted by Findholt et al. (2010) engaged adolescents living in a rural community to photograph the aspects of the community environment that both encouraged and hindered their ability to engage in healthy lifestyle behaviours in order to encourage discussion for community change. Finally, weight bias researchers have also noted the importance of including the voices of individuals with large bodies in stigma reduction research, with one recent study reporting on the perspectives of women with large bodies on 35 stigma reduction strategies (Puhl, Himmelstein, Gorin, & Suh, in press). These findings suggest that, while the voices of individuals with large bodies may be regarded as valuable in the improvement of prevention and intervention programs, the involvement of individuals with large bodies in research efforts to improve health care overall is the exception rather than common practice.

In addition to a lack of involvement in intervention programs, the voices of individuals with large bodies may also not be included in large-scale government projects. For example, the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology (2016) recently published a report on obesity in Canada. In the formation of the report, testimony was provided “from diet experts, nutrition researchers, food retailers and manufacturers, critics of the food industry, healthy living researchers and advocates, medical experts, health charities’

representatives, advocates of the social determinants of health, and the Assembly of First Nations” (p. 1). This description of key informants suggests that perspectives of individuals with large bodies were not explicitly sought. This report has been criticized by researchers for its weight-biased approach to future obesity treatment and prevention in Canada (Thille, Friedman, & Setchell, 2017). Although not included within the senate committee report, the voices of individuals with large bodies have been deemed important within some of the organizations dedicated to obesity and weight bias (i.e., Canadian Obesity Network, National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance).

The absence of voices of individuals with large bodies is also apparent within work related to public health policy and weight discrimination legislation. Research findings in the area of weight bias have provided evidence that members of the general population would support laws protecting individuals from weight discrimination (e.g., Puhl & Heuer, 2011; Suh, Puhl, Lui, & Fleming Milici, 2014). Further, Pomeranz (2008) outlined the need for weight-based discrimination legislation, utilizing a discussion of the history of public health and anti-discrimination lobbying among Black Americans and people with diverse sexual and affectional orientations. In the case for weight discrimination legislation, Pomeranz (2008) called for advocacy from both public health experts and government officials, but did not include a discussion of the role of individuals with large bodies in these advocacy efforts. Despite this discussion in the literature, advocacy groups exist that are dedicated to having the voices of people with large bodies heard, especially with regard to weight discrimination legislation (i.e., National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance).

By highlighting how weight bias is a social justice issue through the lens of procedural justice, it becomes clear that the perspectives of individuals with large bodies are often

marginalized or ignored in the research and government policies and actions that affect them.

Furthermore, safe spaces need to be created where the voices of individuals with large bodies are respected and valued in research, policy, and practice.

Ecological Justice and Weight Bias

Previous researchers have recognized the utility of connecting ecological psychology to social justice in order to examine the interaction of multiple contexts in influencing outcomes (Kenny & Romano, 2009). These researchers have stated that such frameworks (i.e., Bronfenbrenner's [1979] ecological theory of development) aid in highlighting risk and protective factors that influence outcomes and can be beneficial when designing prevention efforts (Kenny & Romano, 2009). According to an ecological perspective of social justice, the environment plays a critical role in influencing opportunities, benefits, and burdens of individuals within a society (Williams & Greenleaf, 2012). Ecological justice in the case of weight bias becomes critically important through a consideration of the social and physical environment within which individuals with large bodies live. Specifically, epidemiological research on the social determinants of body weight, cultural differences in attitudes about individuals with large bodies, and the influence of intersectionality of identities on the social inequities experienced by individuals with large bodies are important considerations from an ecological justice perspective.

Social determinants of weight. Venkatapuram (2009) asserted that the social causes and distribution of health problems are key arguments in calls for social action, and that the connection between epidemiology and social justice is valuable in creating public policy recommendations. Venkatapuram (2009) described social determinants of health as being concerned with the unequal distribution of health problems and illness within society. With

regard to weight specifically, epidemiological research has focused on the social determinants of weight. This research has uncovered a wide range of social and environmental factors that contribute to inequity in weight, including race, gender, socioeconomic status, level of education, and the neighbourhood environment (e.g., Ailshire & House, 2011; Black & Macinko, 2008). Recently, researchers examined the intersectional nature of body weight, and suggested that differences in body weight are influenced by race, gender, educational attainment, and socioeconomic status; with individuals who are black, women, have lower levels of education, and lower income having the largest bodies (Ailshire & House, 2011; Krieger et al., 2014). Other researchers have found that, in utilizing body weight data for men and women from over 150 countries, there is a higher frequency of large bodies among women (Garawi, Devries, Thorogood, & Uauy, 2014).

Researchers have also examined the influence of the neighbourhood environment on weight (e.g., Boone-Heinonen et al., 2013). In a comprehensive literature review of the neighbourhood determinants of body weight, Black and Macinko (2008) described the impact of living in economically deprived neighbourhoods on the occurrence of large bodies. They described such neighbourhoods as being more likely to lack supermarkets with affordable healthy food, leaving community members to either rely on more expensive corner stores or travel longer distances to obtain fresh food. In addition, these neighbourhoods were described as having increased barriers to physical activity, such as fewer recreation facilities, fewer parks, and lower walkability (Black & Macinko, 2008). Results of such epidemiological research investigating the social and community environment impacts on body weight suggested that, while oppression based on body weight impacts all individuals with large bodies, it may intersect with, and add to other forms of oppression, such as racism, sexism, and classism. Taken together,

these results suggest that a plethora of factors influence body weight and, by extension, who is more likely to experience weight bias.

A common incorrect belief and assumption made about body weight is that it is caused by the subtraction of caloric expenditure from caloric intake (Puhl & Heuer, 2009). Obesity research has demonstrated that body weight is determined by a complex set of factors and interconnections between these factors (Foresight, 2007). Epidemiological findings, such as those described above, support this notion of the complexity of body weight through the exploration of the social and environmental causes of body weight.

Weight bias across cultures. In addition to the systemic inequities associated with who experiences higher body weights and thus, who experiences weight bias, it is important to note the differences in attitudes towards people with large bodies across cultural contexts. Although most of the research on weight bias has been conducted using American participants, researchers have examined weight bias in different countries in order to better understand any differences in the extent of weight bias and beliefs about body weight. In a pilot study investigating differences in weight bias across samples from 10 countries including American Samoa, Argentina, Mexico, the United States, and Tanzania, Brewis, Wutich, Falletta-Cowden, and Rodriguez-Soto (2011) suggested that participants from each country, with the exception of Tanzania, indicated some degree of weight bias. Specifically, in interviews, participants noted key ideas that are central to weight bias, including the idea that having a large body reflects a personal failing as well as the idea that weight is an acceptable basis for making judgments about a person's characteristics.

Recently, researchers conducted a study investigating the extent of weight bias across four countries, as well as similarities and differences between countries in the predictors of negative attitudes (Puhl et al., 2015). With a sample of over 2800 participants from the United

States, Canada, Iceland, and Australia, the results suggested that the strength of weight bias was similar across all samples and that, within all samples, behavioural factors that contribute to weight and the belief that weight is a personal responsibility were the strongest predictors of weight bias. Finally, researchers have investigated the differences in weight bias between Black women and White women in the United States (Hebl, King, & Perkins, 2009). The results suggested that, although Black women did endorse negative attitudes towards individuals with large bodies, they were less likely to endorse such negative attitudes compared to White women. The researchers concluded that, given that Black women tend to have larger bodies on average when compared to White women, they might reject dominant body values and perhaps even accept large bodies as “the antithesis of White beauty” (Hebl et al., 2009, p. 1171). Although cross-cultural research might suggest that negative attitudes towards large bodies may be widespread, considerably more research needs to be conducted in order to better understand the differences in the extent and nature of weight bias between countries, as well as between different cultural groups. Further research would provide a more thorough understanding of the experiences of individuals with large bodies within, and between, countries.

Intersectionality of identities. To expand on a previous point, in acknowledging the interaction of multiple contexts in weight bias, it is also important to examine the interaction of multiple identities. Utilizing intersectionality, the interaction between multiple oppressed identities can be examined and better understood, especially with regard to the effect of these interacting identities on power (Davis, 2008; Nolan & Eshleman, 2016; Nurka, 2014). It is clear from the research on the social determinants of weight that obesity occurs more frequently among individuals who are the most disadvantaged; individuals who experience oppression because of race, gender, educational attainment, socioeconomic status, neighbourhood, or a

combination of these factors (Drewnowski, 2009). Researchers in weight bias have also discussed the differences in weight bias experienced by individuals with large bodies based on gender, race, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and mental illness (Courtney, 2008; Fikkun & Rothblum, 2012; Mizock, 2012). As discussed above, results from research conducted in education suggested that teachers' perceptions of children with large bodies differ for girls versus boys (Kenny et al., 2015), and that females with large bodies are less likely to enter post-secondary education (Crosnoe, 2007). Further, within employment, Vanhove and Gordon (2014) suggested that women experience greater weight-based discrimination than men. These findings support the statement by van Amsterdam (2013) that weight bias is "deeply gendered" (p. 159). Researchers examining weight bias through the lens of intersectionality have suggested that weight bias may be experienced more strongly among individuals who are low in socioeconomic status, heterosexual, and individuals who struggle with mental illness (Courtney, 2008; Donaghue, 2014; Mizock, 2012).

In summary, when examined through the lens of ecological justice, weight bias becomes clearer, in that higher body weight and weight bias may differently impact individuals based on their social and physical environments, culture, and identities. It is important to consider how combinations of these factors may alter the impact of weight bias in the lives of individuals with large bodies.

Weight Bias and Social Justice: Implications for Counselling Psychology

In professional education, it is useful to examine the concept of social justice from multiple perspectives and from multiple types of learning experiences (Collins, Arthur, Brown, & Kennedy, 2015). In the preceding sections, we positioned weight bias as a social justice issue through the lens of distributive justice, procedural justice, and ecological justice. Utilizing

weight bias literature, this discussion demonstrated that individuals with large bodies experience; (a) inequity with regard to the distribution of opportunities, resources, and power in multiple contexts throughout the lifespan; (b) limited voice in the research, prevention and intervention efforts, and policy making that directly impacts their lives; and (c) interactions with multiple other identity factors that influence the degree of weight bias they may experience in their lives. These three perspectives have implications for approaches to professional education. This section will highlight the implications of positioning weight bias as a social justice issue for counselling psychology education through a discussion of integrated social justice pedagogy (Sinacore & Enns, 2005). In developing the integrated social justice pedagogy, Sinacore and Enns (2005) reviewed the similarities and differences between multiple feminist and multicultural positions, integrating their findings into four common dimensions: (a) individual empowerment and social change, (b) knowledge and the knower, (c) single or multiple oppressions and privileges, and (d) reflexivity and self-awareness.

Sinacore and Enns (2005) asserted that both individual empowerment and social change must be emphasized in order to create transformative change within individuals as well as within social structures (Sinacore & Enns, 2005; Sinacore & Kassan, 2011). With regard to weight bias, a consideration of the individual empowerment and social change dimension highlights the need for the education of counselling psychologists to focus not only on the empowerment of clients with large bodies, but also the recognition of the larger social structures that serve to disempower and oppress them. In addition to recognizing the oppressive social forces, such as those discussed above, we can consider the empowerment of clients with large bodies through techniques that have been successful among clients with eating disorders and body image, such as dissonance-based techniques (Ciao, Loth, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2014) or a focus on embodiment (Piran &

Teall, 2012).

Integrated social justice pedagogy also emphasizes the importance of including the worldviews of diverse groups in addition to the dominant view (Sinacore & Enns, 2005). Multiple other worldviews, or ways of knowing, can be valued and incorporated into counselling psychology education, and the dominant worldview can be critically analyzed with regard to how privilege and oppression develop (Sinacore & Enns, 2005; Sinacore & Kassan, 2011). With regard to weight bias, the dominant perspective to be critically analyzed would be the weight-based discourses that position large bodies as inherently unhealthy or diseased, and weight as simply the result of energy intake versus energy expenditure (Bombak, 2014; Cooper, 2010; van Amsterdam, 2013). Alternative views are important to add to this conversation, such as a health at every size perspective, which views society as obsessed with weight, leaving no room for natural body diversity, and focuses on health promotion without the goal of weight loss for individuals of all sizes (Bacon & Aphramor, 20011; Miller, 2005). Additionally, the fat activist perspective is critical of dominant weight-based discourses, rejects the medicalization of weight and the term obesity, and advocates for the recognition that large bodies are not unhealthy, but a form of natural body diversity (Bombak, 2014; Cooper, 2010; Saguy & Riley, 2005).

Similar to individual empowerment and social change, Sinacore and Enns (2005) asserted that it is important to focus on both single and multiple oppressions and privileges. They described how many approaches emphasize one specific form of oppression, such as oppression based on race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation, which helps to ensure a depth of understanding of the oppression of specific groups. The consideration of multiple oppressions and how different identities intersect allow for a more nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of different individuals, while maintaining attentiveness to privilege and oppression

(Sinacore & Enns, 2005; Sinacore & Kassan, 2011). When incorporating weight bias into an integrated social justice pedagogy, it is therefore important to not only discuss the stigma and oppression experienced by individuals with large bodies, but to also discuss the intersectional nature of this oppression, as highlighted in the above section on ecological justice. We argue that weight bias impacts individuals of all bodies, not just individuals with large bodies, and that lived experiences differ depending on individuals' weight, gender, race, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and mental health status (Courtney, 2008; Fikkun & Rothblum, 2012; Mizock, 2012).

Sinacore and Enns (2005) recognized that reflexivity and self-awareness are critical components of all multicultural and feminist perspectives, and that raising awareness of the experiences of oppressed individuals is important for connecting their personal, educational, and professional experiences. Within integrated social justice pedagogy, reflexivity and self-awareness highlight the importance of exploring individual biases, attitudes, assumptions, and stereotypes in order for individuals to become aware of the experiences of oppressed individuals and the concepts of fairness and equality (Sinacore & Enns, 2005; Sinacore & Kassan, 2011). With regard to weight bias as a part of an integrated social justice pedagogy, raising awareness of the oppression and lived experiences of individuals with large bodies is just as important as exploring individual attitudes, assumptions, and biases towards individuals with large bodies. Utilizing self-awareness to recognize social location can be a powerful educational experience in connecting with the stereotypes and attitudes that impact individuals with large bodies.

Conclusion: Moving Towards the Recognition of Weight Bias as a Social Justice Issue

Weight bias is a pervasive and persistent form of oppression, which intersects with other

forms of oppression to impact the lives of individuals with large bodies in all areas of society. In the reconnection to social justice in counselling psychology, we are in a unique position to recognize the systemic oppression experienced by individuals with large bodies and reflect upon the attitudes, assumptions, and social discourses that contribute to weight bias. A commitment to social justice with regard to weight bias by counselling psychologists will potentially help to provide more opportunities, more power, and more resources to individuals with large bodies and will help to ensure that the voices of individuals with bodies of all sizes are valued in research, practice, and the greater community. We encourage future research about the ways that social justice pedagogy impacts the practice of counselling psychology. It is also important to consider what we can learn from other areas of psychology, such as social psychology, and other professional disciplines where consumer and service user voices are included in the development and design of research, policy, and practice. Although the scope of this paper focuses on counselling psychology, we encourage dialogue between professional disciplines and specializations to consider how their views of social justice and body size may impact their work. Reducing weight bias is good for everybody, at any body size.

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