

Fat bullying of girls in school: Implications for pre-service teacher education

by

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Abstract

Bullying of girls based on their body size remains a problem in schools that often appears to be tolerated and neglected by adult staff. Thus far, there has been a limited amount of research on this topic, including a lack of investigation of students' perspectives of being bullied for their heavier weight. In my thesis, I interviewed six female pre-service teachers who had experienced fat bullying in elementary and secondary school. They were asked about these experiences, how their peers, teachers, and administrative staff responded at the time, and what impact their experiences might have for future teachers. Through critical discourse analysis, my analysis of the data revealed systemic oppression of fat youth through bullying and exclusion that was often tolerated, and occasionally even encouraged, by staff in Health and Physical Education settings such as gymnasiums, outdoor fields, and the girls' change room, as well as other environments including the academic classroom, recess, and cafeteria. Further, these participants, although once victims of fat bullying, reproduced fatphobic discourse when discussing their experiences and future plans, thereby creating the possibility that they themselves might unwittingly reinforce fatphobia when they become teachers. Given these findings, three recommendations are offered for pre-service teacher education: 1) Offer a specific course, or part of a course, that tackles oppression and bullying from a systemic perspective; 2) Ensure that fat pedagogy is infused throughout Health and Physical Education courses; and 3) Offer workshops on fat bullying.

Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction	1
Description of Research Study.....	1
Personal Background	3
Context and Rationale.....	5
Research Questions.....	7
Chapter Two: Literature Review	8
Discourse.....	8
Women’s Pressure to be Thin.....	12
Ideas of the Obesity Epidemic	16
Conceptions of Fat Within Explicit and Implicit Curricula.....	18
Fat Bullying	22
Theoretical Framing of Research.....	30
Chapter Three: Methodology and Methods	33
Methodology.....	33
Role of the Researcher	36
Methods.....	37
Limitations	41
Ethics.....	41
Chapter Four: Findings	44
Theme One: Concepts of Health.....	44
Theme Two: Physical Education and Activity in School Environments.....	52
Theme Three: Other School Environments	59
Theme Four: Assigning Responsibility	65
Theme Five: Their Future Students	75
Chapter 5: Discussion	81
Concepts of Health.....	81
Physical Education and Activity in School Environments	86
Other School Environments.....	89
Assigning Responsibility	92
Their Future Students.....	97
Implications for Critical Pedagogy and Fat Studies	99
Recommendations.....	101
Conclusion	105
References.....	108
Appendix A: Recruitment Letter	118
Appendix B: Description of Study.....	119
Appendix C: Consent Form For Participants.....	120
Appendix D: Interview Outline	121

Chapter One: Introduction

Description of Research Study

Bullying within schools is linked to various forms of oppression: racism, homophobia, sexism, and classism, to name a few. However, one form of bullying that remains hardly addressed, and indeed is blatantly tolerated if not perpetuated by adults in power, is related to body size. The media plays a large role in producing fatphobic messages that depict fatness as either comedic or ugly. Two contemporary examples immediately come to mind. One, Toronto mayor Rob Ford's controversial actions have nothing to do with his weight, yet it has not stopped the media and the public from ridiculing him for being fat (Walton & Russell, 2014). Two, celebrity reality star Kim Kardashian endured harsh criticism for her drastic weight gain, even though she was gaining weight due to pregnancy (London, 2013). These are but two examples. Marinating in a media culture of thinness, students learn the hidden curriculum of fatphobia, which is reinforced by many teachers who are concerned with addressing what is widely described as the "obesity epidemic"¹ (Wann, 2009).

As with most forms of prejudice, fatphobia is based on the fear of being different from the dominant discourse of idealism with respect to bodies, regardless of actual body size (DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2012). While many teachers and schools do not consciously target "fat"² youth, they often subconsciously use discursive practices that reproduce fatphobic ideologies that torment fat youth (Hetrick & Attig, 2009; Peterson, Puhl & Leudicke, 2011; Weinstock & Krehbiel, 2009). Indeed, fatphobia is deeply embedded

¹ This phrase is in quotation marks to indicate its political construction at the outset. I will not use quotation marks beyond this page for aesthetic reasons, but nonetheless want to make clear here that "obesity" is a highly contested term (Bacon, 2010; Burgard, 2009; Callahan, 2013; Wann, 2009).

² In practicing fat studies, I choose to use the word "fat" to reclaim the word "fat" as part of fostering the political identity of fat people as a group.

within North American society, including schools. Pre-service teachers have been, and will be, part of school culture, yet thus far there is little evidence that teacher education requires them to critically engage with fatphobia so that they are able to disrupt its reproduction in schools and beyond.

There is very little research on fat bullying in schools (Weinstock & Krehbiel, 2009), including student perspectives. Therefore, my thesis research investigated the school experiences of fat bullying of recent female high school graduates who are now pre-service teachers. I analyzed what participants shared with me about their experiences of fat bullying and their perceptions of how peers, teachers, and administrators responded. I was particularly interested in how these pre-service teachers might reinforce or challenge fatphobia when they themselves become teachers. The end goal of my research was to make recommendations for pre-service teacher programs to appropriately and effectively address these issues within schools to foster a safer learning and social environment for students of all sizes.

Critical pedagogy, fat studies, and feminism informed this qualitative study, and I used a critical discourse methodology to analyze participants' experiences of fat bullying in school. Through individual interviews, I engaged in conversations with female pre-service teachers about their experiences of fat bullying. I inquired into how they were bullied as a result of their weight, how they may also have acted as bullies themselves or witnessed bullying, how they intervened against or ignored such bullying, and how figures in a position of authority reacted to witnessing or being told stories of fat bullying. I then analyzed the discourses they used as they described their experiences. Participants varied between using fatphobic discourse, fat-positive discourse, healthy

living discourse, and obesity discourse.³ In the end, my research shed insight into how school environments foster the oppression of fat youth and, in response, I offer some suggestions on how teacher education might respond to this problem.

Personal Background

I am a white woman of Italian, French, Irish, and British descent. Although I was born in Ireland, my parents immigrated to Canada in 1986 and I identify myself foremost as Canadian. I grew up with a lower-middle class status, so I feel fortunate to have had the opportunity to complete an Honours Bachelor of Arts degree in English Studies, a Bachelor of Education degree, and to now be completing a Masters degree in Education.

Throughout elementary and secondary school, I perceived fat negatively and was hurt when I was called a fat girl. For a long time, I remembered my experiences of being fat bullied as an example of my inability to stand up for myself. In an undergraduate class in psychology, I was taught that some students who bully others use rage directed at others as an outlet for their internal struggles, thus they can be understood as victims themselves. So, I learned to forgive the people involved, including myself, as we were “just kids.” Being introduced years later to critical pedagogy within the MEd program, however, opened my eyes to the systemic forces within schools that permit and punish certain behaviours according to dominant ideologies embedded within North American culture (Walton, 2005). I now understand my own experiences of fat bullying differently and use the term “fat” positively and as a political act.

³ “Obesity discourse” is the use of medical language to refer to fat people and to focus primarily on their health (using a narrow definition of health). It is ubiquitous in the medical profession, physical education, and the media. “Fatphobic discourse” relies on negative stereotypes about fat people as well as obesity discourse to make fatphobic claims, such as associating fat people with laziness and lack of willpower. “Fat-positive discourse” counters fatphobic discourse by promoting the health benefits of fat and noting that fat people are as beautiful as people of any other body size; it is a key element of the fat acceptance movement.

Critical researchers “want to speak to, and perhaps, intervene in, social or political issues, problems, and controversies in the world. They want to apply their work to the world in some fashion” (Gee, 2010, p. 9). As someone who has begun a lifelong commitment to practicing critical thinking, I now recognize that school administrators are themselves part of a fatphobic culture that tolerates, indeed encourages, fat shaming in the guise of helping address the obesity epidemic (Cameron et al., 2014; Weinstock & Krehbiel, 2009). The administration in my school may have felt it was their duty to enforce a standardized image of health. If fat bullying was not recognized as bullying per se, but seen as a tool to help fat youth make change, then school staff presumably could tolerate it, even justify it. I now feel like I was less a victim of my peers than a victim of the ignorance and neglect of adult staff who were supposed to protect me but instead were part of the problem.

Now that I am informed about fat oppression within schools, I cannot stand by and let it continue. I view my research project, then, as a form of action that I hope will help to publicize injustices faced by fat youth, to promote discussion in teacher education programs, and to guide future researchers interested in pedagogical approaches that could help fat students.

I now identify myself as a healthy, fat, graduate student. I do not identify as fat to openly criticise my body as some may think; I am simply saying that I have an excess of fat on my body and that the extra weight does not say anything about the status of my health. I was always fat and, as a result, always bullied. I never examined this “fact” critically, however; despite being taught in a secondary school media literacy course to be critical of advertisements, I did not apply this skill to my understanding of my own body

image. I devalued my body and wished to be thin. I had gone years without ever stepping on a scale, but in May, 2010, I decided to weigh myself: I was 236 pounds on my 5'6" frame. I then changed the way I ate, became more active, and lost a significant amount of weight. Given my internalized fatphobia, I found the results rewarding, but I admit that as I strove to lose weight, I often felt faint and nauseous. Even now that my weight has stabilized, I sometimes feel dizzy. How is that a sign of health? I now think that the mainstream advertising industry that endorses thinness as the ideal has won. I internalized the expectations based upon dominant ideologies about body size and I obsessively worked towards meeting them. Even now, truly letting go of my own fatphobia remains challenging; for example, I continue to check the scale for any drastic fluctuations in weight. I do not want to gain any of the lost weight back. Although I am cognizant of how one's weight does not necessarily diagnose one's health, I remain fearful to relive the negative stigma and endure the normalized oppression that comes with being fat.

Context and Rationale

Almost four years later, the image of those 236 pounds remains ingrained in my head as the heaviest I have ever weighed and the most disgusted I had ever been with my body. When I entered the MEd program at a much lower weight, I saw myself as a different person than I was in high school. Still feeling euphoric about my weight loss, I pondered conducting a thesis in health promotion, and school policy changes to include more physical activity and more nutrition programs to fight the so-called obesity epidemic. I now humbly admit that I held a naïve and ignorant perspective that if we could make everyone thin (therefore healthy), there would be no fat youth to bully.

Fortunately, one of the first assignments in my Critical Pedagogy course was an autobiographical account of a social category where I might feel underprivileged. I think I have been quite privileged in my life in most respects, so I wrote about my weight and how I was bullied as a teenager. Upon critical reflection through the assignment, I began to see how the emphasis on my body weight started with my Grade Seven physical education teacher rather than with my peers. She was a very athletic woman who, rather than motivating all students with her passion for activity, set up her gym class with high expectations of physical prowess that had to be met. She started to separate students according to their ability and her preferences for “fit” bodies. Unfortunately, other students learned from how she treated those of us deemed less fit and able, and new social groups were formed as a result. This teacher did not welcome me in the gymnasium, and other students started excluding me from activities as well. I started believing that my weight was the sole reason for my unhappiness and lack of friends. I lost interest in sports in fear of being chastised and embarrassed.

When I received feedback on this autobiographical assignment from my instructor, she recommended I read *The Fat Studies Reader* (Rothblum & Solovay, 2009). Reading chapters that discuss how weight is negotiated, and how weight privileges some and oppresses others, offered a critical counterpoint that helped me view my experiences of fat bullying differently. I began to see how students learn the “hidden curriculum” of fatphobia, which is reinforced by many teachers who are concerned with addressing the obesity epidemic (Cameron et al., 2014). The dehumanization of fat youth is enacted through fat bullying and fat shaming, both of which can have serious negative

influences on self-esteem, safety in schools, and school achievement (Weinstock & Krehbiel, 2009).

With this new critical lens, I began to wonder if pre-service teachers who have had similar fat bullying experiences might be in danger of reproducing fat oppression just as I had been. (Imagine if I had taken a teaching job straight out of my BEd program rather than do this MEd?) Like me, through no fault of their own, perhaps other pre-service teachers who were victims of fat bullying had begun to believe some of the insults and internalized this oppression, and also now wanted to promote initiatives that perpetuate the oppression of fat youth? I know that, as an educator, I would not tolerate bullying in general, but without the information I now have, I may not have challenged fat bullying because of my skewed idea that measuring weight constitutes one's health. This was all speculation on my part, therefore I sought to ask other female pre-service teachers who have been fat bullied about their own experiences and their intentions as future teachers.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What were female pre-service teachers' experiences with fat bullying in elementary and/or secondary school?
2. How did their peers, teachers, and administrative staff participate in or respond to the fat bullying that they experienced?
3. What were the pedagogical implications for them as learners, and what will be the pedagogical implications for them as teachers?

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The scholarly literature in fat studies is growing, and schools are increasingly being recognized as sites of fat oppression. In this literature review, six themes surface from my analysis of the scholarship as foundational for research on this topic. First, the literature exposes a common fatphobic discourse that the media propagates and popular culture absorbs into its lexicon. Second, research reveals women to be particularly vulnerable targets of fat shaming and more likely than men to pursue thinness to escape the negative stigma. Women who cannot “control” their weight are seen as inferior and susceptible to judgement, marginalization and harassment, reflecting our undeniably fatphobic culture. Third, schools are sites of legitimized privilege and, as such, reflect obsession within society with weight as the primary indicator of health; school cultures have contributed to endorsing the fight against the obesity epidemic, apparently blithely unaware of research that contests its very existence and the myths associated with it. Fourth, Ontario’s health and physical education curriculum expectations do not challenge obesity discourse. Fifth, schools foster discrimination against students deemed “overweight”⁴ while privileging thin and fit bodies. Fat bullying is part of the fat oppression that is tolerated in schools. Finally, literature surrounding critical pedagogy, feminist theory, and fat studies helped to provide a theoretical framework that informs this research.

Discourse

Health and obesity discourse, as well as the media’s fascination with mocking and criticizing fat bodies, has normalized fat oppression. This normalization is evident in

⁴ “Overweight” and “underweight” are politically charged terms used by medical professionals and the general public to label people of different sizes. However, these words suggest that there is a precise weight range for all humans to stay within, with those deemed “over” and “under” not meeting this alleged norm.

health promotion policies containing healthy living discourse. Found “in many parts of the world, including Canada, the main emphasis of the health living discourse today is body weight and related behaviours, specifically healthy eating and active living” (Clow, 2013, p. 35). This narrow focus, as Clow (2013) argues, results in “healthy living policies and programs [that] revolve around the ‘energy in-energy out’ equation” (p. 35). This discourse, among other health and obesity discourses, contributes to the creation of common misconceptions that most accept as simply true and very few publicly challenge, such as fat being a death sentence, weight being controllable, and contemporary children being heavier now than ever before. All of these “facts” are contested. There has not been any evidence showing that weight loss lengthens one’s lifespan (McGee, 2005) and studies have shown that fat people tend to live longer than those of “normal” or lower weights (Bacon, 2010; Burgard, 2009; McGee, 2005). Body weight has been observed to have a mind of its own, so to speak, as “biology dictates that most people regain the weight they lose, even if they continue their diet and exercise programs” (Bacon, 2010, p. 164). Finally, with greater food security in contemporary society and more people living sedentary lifestyles focused on gaming, computers, screen entertainment, and consumption of junk food, it is not surprising that an increase in average weight has occurred. What may be counterintuitive for the fatphobic, however, is that alongside this development, there also has been a decrease in chronic disease and increase in life expectancy in the population (Bacon, 2010).

In response to fat oppression, Wann (2009) describes the recent development and progress of fat studies, a radical discipline aimed at challenging weight-related ideologies, questioning dominant prejudice against fat individuals, and welcoming body

weight diversity. Wann's foreword in *The Fat Studies Reader* (2009) introduces the many movements and associations that endorse size acceptance and social justice for the fat community. She also discusses word choice and identifies "obesity" as a politically charged term that is not neutral and in fact serves an economic purpose. Obesity promotes a notion of fatness as a disease in need of a cure, namely, eating healthy, exercise, and when all else fails, surgery. According to Wann (2009), research that contests many of the misconceptions about the health of fat people are ignored by decision-makers, the obesity industry, and the public for all sorts of reasons. For example, the obesity industry (which includes weight loss and diet programs, low-fat food, gyms) is a multi-billion dollar phenomenon (Wann, 2009) with much to gain from obesity discourse.

Bacon (2009) sees the nutrition-based profession as part of the obesity industry. Most nutritionists and dieticians, when first encountering patients, calculate their "healthy" weight according to the Body Mass Index (BMI), itself a highly problematic measurement tool with little empirical evidence to support its usage (Burkhauser & Cawley, 2006). Then, they outline a diet and exercise plan. Like many in the medical profession, they understand fat as a problem despite the fact that fat people tend to live longer because to a certain extent the abundance of fat can act as a protective agent against disease (Bacon, 2009; Burgard, 2009), body weight and metabolism can be genetically inherited, and bodies tend to resist weight loss as a health precaution (Bacon, 2009). One's weight or appearance alone cannot denote one's level of health.

People of all sizes experience the same illnesses, such as cancer and influenza, yet fat people are often blamed for their disease as a direct result of their weight (Burgard,

2009). Given the complex relationship between weight and health, a contemporary movement called “Health at Every Size” (HAES) has emerged (Bacon, 2009; Burgard, 2009). HAES focuses on self-acceptance and the passion for daily healthy practices rather than focusing on weight reduction. The HAES movement admits that sometimes by adopting their philosophy people have lost weight due to the change in lifestyle choices, but weight loss is not an advertised outcome of this movement as it primarily advocates for acceptance of body diversity. In a thin-obsessed society, refusal of a weight loss goal can appear very controversial. When society declares “war” on an alleged obesity epidemic and medical professionals are soldiers rescuing civilian hostages from the scourge of obesity, fat oppression endures.

Health education is seen as one way to “fight” the obesity epidemic and researchers trying to influence health education policies tend to use the Body Mass Index (BMI) as the foundation of their studies in which they categorize students as “underweight,” “normal,” “overweight,” and “obese” (Greenleaf, Chambliss, Rhea, Martin & Morrow, 2006; Puhl, Luedicke & Heuer, 2011; Taylor, 2011). These categories are used to sort and rank students in a hierarchical arrangement of privilege. Meanwhile, few people, apparently even including researchers, are aware that the BMI is a highly dubious measure of health adopted by the insurance industry and that the categories magically shifted within the last decade, rendering far more people “overweight” and “obese” without any clear medical rationale (Wann, 2009).

Fatness is not a disease and individuals with a higher BMI are not at a greater health risk, except at the very high end of the scale (Burkhauser & Cawley, 2006). Further, medicalization of fatness ignores social aspects of weight including access to

health care, socio-economic status, accessibility of healthy food as well as the mental health consequences of fat oppression. Burgard (2009) criticizes the lack of understanding, compassion, and acceptance from the medical community. The HAES movement, on the other hand, seeks a more holistic understanding of weight and health, focusing on the body and mind in its entirety. Further, the movement accepts people from across the weight spectrum, seeking to de-emphasize weight and disrupt its stigma and associated anxiety.

There is little evidence for the long-term effects of weight loss (Burgard, 2009) as most who lose weight regain it shortly thereafter. Schafer and Ferraro (2011) also note the lack of evidence linking heavier weight and health risks. Instead, they suggest examining whether weight discrimination and stigmatization actually increase the likelihood of shorter life expectancies, making a connection to past studies that found racism toward African-Americans attributed to lower quality of health. Alleviating some of the pressure on fat people to “fix themselves,” Schafer and Ferraro (2011) note how individuals of different races have addressed some of their health concerns through finding pride in their ethnic group identity and community. As it stands now, however, it remains difficult for most people to happily label themselves as fat even with social movements aimed at self-acceptance, such as HAES and fat studies. Wann (2009) argues that fat oppression will persist if the typical focus is on changing bodies rather than disrupting the dominant mindframe.

Women’s Pressure to be Thin

Attempting to control weight is prevalent in North America, as a result of both men’s and women’s dissatisfaction with their body shapes and sizes (Sheldon, 2010).

Many men try to adopt the masculine ideal by seeking to build and tone muscle mass, while women are concerned with being thin and losing weight regardless of their actual size (Sheldon, 2010). Everybody is affected by these alleged achievable standards, but Sheldon (2010) argues that women garner more negative criticism when they are unsuccessful as they “are often defined [by] their bodies; and their bodies are treated as objects that exist for the sexual pleasure of men” (p. 278). Therefore, women are generally more vulnerable to negative weight stigma (Puhl & Brownell, 2001, 2006; Roehling, Roehling & Pichler, 2007; Walton & Russell, 2014), and the thin ideal is mostly pursued by women of all sizes to escape that stigma (Connor-Greene, 1988; Dohnt & Tiggemann, 2005; Harper & Tiggemann, 2008).

Rodin, Silberstein, and Striegel-Moore (1985) coined the term “normative discontent” which aptly articulates women’s body dissatisfaction and their persistent desire to mirror the thin ideal (Dohnt & Tiggemann, 2005; Sheldon, 2010). Such normative discontent begins as early as six years of age (Lowes & Tiggemann, 2003). Searching for just how young normative discontent could begin, Dohnt and Tiggemann (2005) studied 5-year-old girls, using age-appropriate methods where the participants pointed to silhouettes they perceived to be their own size and to silhouettes they desired to be. These girls consistently desired to be smaller than they were. Further, following a reading about a fictional character’s lifestyle, the girls attributed any weight gain to unhealthy eating and said they would diet themselves if they gained weight. These disturbing results showed how such young girls have already learned the desire to be thin and have an acute awareness of dieting culture.

Media-saturated North American society closely monitors the female body (Taylor, 2011) and cultivates mass fatphobia that encourages within women the desire to achieve the thin ideal (Levitt, 2004). Like homophobia, racism, and misogyny, fatphobia describes, as a social phenomenon, an extreme and irrational aversion to a group of people, in this case, those branded as “overweight.” As with most forms of prejudice, fatphobia is based on the fear of being different (DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2009), in this case from the dominant ideal body. Fat people are stereotyped as having few friends and lacking health, happiness, and pride (Greenleaf et al., 2006; Levitt, 2004; Wann, 2009). In contrast, Greenleaf et al. (2006) found that being thin was associated with being confident, happy, smart, kind, and honest. A dualism is created with thin as good and fat as bad, fuelling a fatphobic culture.

Harper and Tiggemann (2008) assert that popular culture plays a vital role in women’s ambition to lose weight. Their research explores how perpetual exposure to magazine covers with thin images fosters body dissatisfaction in all observers. Viewing the thin ideal resulted in more negative body images than viewing plus-size models. Their research also found that women not only objectify themselves but also other women when viewing media images of female bodies.

Thinness has indeed become a key attribute of female beauty in Western culture. In contrast, Fiji is a country whose citizens historically valued fat, but with an influx of Westernized mass media, have demonstrated a change in their cultural body ideals (Ireland, 2009; Kong, 2007). In Western contexts, too, historically, media in the form of art and plays idealized a voluptuous female body. Even as recently as the 1950s, Marilyn Monroe’s curvy body was idealized, yet today she would be considered fat and face

constant online criticism. This shift in perception from curvy to thin contributes to contemporary internal conflict among teenage girls. Advertisements and social expectations pressure girls and women to be thin in pursuit of beauty that is now normatively coded as thin.

As well, advertisements sell ideas and products that convince women that their weight is manageable (Wann, 2009), when our bodies in fact resist weight loss to maintain health (Bacon, 2009). The fear of deviating from the ideal encourages women to undergo dangerous methods to manage their weight. Women are taught both deliberately and subconsciously to use diet, exercise, supplements, and surgery as tools to manipulate their bodies to fit into this arbitrarily decided norm. A majority of women engage in or consider unhealthy modes of weight management to achieve this goal, including disordered eating which can lead to bulimia and anorexia (Greenleaf et al., 2006; Levitt, 2004; Mackey & La Greca, 2008; Wann, 2009). For those women unable to control their weight to reach dominant expectations, they experience body shaming directed at them both by others and themselves (Sheldon, 2010).

It is important to note that women of all sizes are potential victims of this weight-anxiety: underweight women require more curves, thin women must work to maintain their image, and overweight women are urged to lose weight to meet dominant expectations (Bacon, 2009; Russell, Cameron, Socha & McNinch, 2013). For the purpose of this study, however, I have focused on fat women's experience of fat oppression. Thin privilege provides many advantages including a larger dating pool, greater choice of fashions with more respect from retailers, and easier access in certain settings such as airplane seating and narrow store aisles (Bacon, 2009). Kirkland (2008) indicates that

thin privilege confers a greater chance of being hired over candidates of equal experience but bigger size. Dohnt and Tiggemann (2005) also note the general assumption that “girls believed being thin would increase likeability” (p. 110). Thin women are also considered happier, more confident, more attractive to men (which assumes heterosexuality), and more powerful (Bacon, 2009; Levitt, 2004). As Bacon (2009) notes, thin privilege only exists in relationship to fat oppression.

Examples of fat oppression clearly emerge when women deviate from the thin norm and then endure prejudice, negative stigma, and discrimination. Burgard (2009) discusses the hypocrisy in condoning dietary treatment for heavier individuals while disapproving of similar behaviour by lighter people, especially those with eating disorders. She asks readers to imagine a light girl subjecting herself to dieting, calorie counting, body dissatisfaction, and the displeasure of exercising when she is tired, then she asks readers to add 80 pounds to the same girl. For the fat girl, the eating habits suddenly appear appropriate and the lack of exercise typical and, in fact, the reason for her lack of success with weight loss. This anti-fat culture can only survive in the midst of a politically charged agenda called the obesity epidemic.

Ideas of the Obesity Epidemic

In addition to equating thin with beauty, Dohnt and Tiggemann (2005) found that most women are also taught to equate thinness with health and perfection. Thus, in an individual’s desire to be healthy, she must also strive to be thin. Robertson and Thomson (2012) warn:

This focus on weight and shape has two consequences: first, certain sizes, shapes, and weights become preferred and privileged; and second, health is not seen as a condition determined by multiple complex factors, but one determined by weight

and activity levels that require monitoring to prevent a health crisis such as an obesity epidemic. (p. 337)

Weight loss companies are a \$58.6 billion dollar industry in the United States alone that contributes to the pressure on women to be thin (Wann, 2009). Their propaganda, aided and abetted by the medical and public health communities, has increased awareness of the obesity epidemic that further cultivates a fatphobic culture.

Fatphobic ideologies make use of obesity epidemic discourse. School administrators, teachers, and coaches reproduce the damaging discourse of a purported increase in childhood obesity, and target “unhealthy” and “unathletic” bodies in schools (Sykes & McPhail, 2011, p. 52). By equating fat with a disease, schools ultimately teach students that there is a universal cure: diet and exercise. They also teach that the only healthy body is a thin body, which is patently untrue given thin people can be unhealthy and fat people healthy. Achieving health becomes simplified to counting calories and engaging in lots of physical activity, which some adolescents, and indeed some adults, tend to take to extreme by over-exercising and under-eating.

Further, schools that use health promotion programs that perpetuate the idea that weight is controllable imply that fat students are weak because they lack willpower (Greenleaf et al., 2006). The blame is placed on individuals rather than on dominant discourses, attitudes, and ideologies that deem fatness unhealthy and a signifier of lax morals with little self-discipline (Weinstock & Krehbiel, 2009). As a result, students blame themselves for their victimization and internalize the dominant thin ideal, causing them to see their weight as their own character flaw. Health measures that rely predominately on encouraging healthy and proportionate eating alongside exercise are initiated in many schools and are not in themselves necessarily problematic, but Levitt

(2004) argues that the concomitant declaration of a “war on obesity” creates hysteria and a fear of fat and the resultant social exclusion, isolation, and rejection that can follow. No wonder, then, that many students attempt to avoid these feelings by striving for the thin ideal.

While individual adolescents bear the brunt of these anti-fat messages, school initiatives also place considerable pressure on parents of fat youth as well, particularly mothers. Sexist ideologies claim that working mothers are away too often thus unable to monitor their child’s food intake and physical activity (Boero, 2009). Although this argument alleviates some blame being placed on youth themselves, the social attitudes that operate in schools are not interrogated; further, it is telling that mothers, not fathers, are the ones who are typically accused. It is mothers’ parenting abilities that are called into question when their fat children misbehave in class and their child’s weight is seen to demonstrate an inability to self-regulate behaviour (Boero, 2009). Criticism of mothers even occurs prior to birth with “pregnant fat women ... warned that their own weight before and during pregnancy puts their foetus at risk for any number of things, including becoming a fat child” (p. 117). Fatphobia and sexism go hand in hand when blaming mothers for heavier children.

Conceptions of Fat Within Explicit and Implicit Curricula

Dohnt and Tiggemann (2005) discern that the age of students being aware of dieting strategies and body dissatisfaction occurs at the same age as entry into school. Their claim in mind, I turn now to a more detailed discussion of the ways in which fat oppression permeates school culture.

Explicit curriculum. What is taught in schools could help to change fatphobic attitudes toward weight and disrupt the stigma faced by fat individuals. However, curriculum and policy currently reinforce fatphobic ideologies. For example, health and physical education cannot be inclusive of, and safe for, all body sizes while it adopts obesity discourse that equates a healthy body with the idealized fit body (Cameron et al., 2014). The fit ideal is an impossible goal for most bodies to attain, and often relies on a notion of the body as a machine that must be subjected to power, control, and discipline (Cameron et al., 2014; Sykes & McPhail, 2011).

Cameron et al. (2014) argue that the explicit curriculum in some subjects (e.g., English, media studies) teaches students to be sceptical of the media, but this scepticism does not typically extend to health and physical education classrooms. Robertson and Thomson (2012) analyzed curricula across Canada in the hope of finding a complex portrayal of body image where all sizes are recognized rather than “definitions of good health [that] focus on being a certain size, and regulating lifestyle choices” (p. 336). They criticize health and physical education that focuses on lifestyle and dismisses genetics, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and other environmental factors. With results that showed a lack of complexity in defining health in the majority of Canada’s health and physical education curricula, Robertson and Thomson (2012) assert that “[w]hen the curriculum policy undertakes to pressure students to conform to certain sizes and shapes, it raises the question of whether the curriculum policy message is too focused for a diverse population” (p. 345).

Their study revealed that two provinces, Alberta and PEI, stood out as leaders in promoting positive body images, deconstructing privilege, and teaching about diverse

shapes and sizes across all elementary grades. Alberta's Physical Education curriculum discusses body image in terms of different abilities different bodies can have, and in PEI, the health education curriculum specifically addresses Health at Every Size and the innate diversity in body shape.

Given the geographical focus of my research, I was curious to see what they found about Ontario. According to Robertson and Thomson (2012), the Ontario curriculum does not begin to discuss body image until Grade 5 in health and physical education when students are between the ages of 10 and 11. The health and physical education curriculum introduces eating disorders in Grade 8. According to them, the overall focus of the curriculum is teaching students about their personal responsibility to make healthy eating choices and maintain an active lifestyle. This finding is reminiscent of Gard's (2003) work; he noted how students often are not empowered to make their own decisions but are told what health and lifestyle decisions ought to be taken.

Of course, health and physical education is not the sole class environment for perpetuating weight-based oppression of fat students, and indeed one can imagine many cross-curricular opportunities to address or reinforce fat oppression (e.g. English, biology, psychology, sociology, family studies). At the university level, Koppelman (2009) reviewed several course syllabi to determine how fat people were being represented. She did not criticize what literature was chosen for use, but rather examined how instructors interpreted the literature and how they taught about it. She found that a majority of instructors within the medical, psychological, and sociological fields reinforced weight-based prejudice, leaving "no room for consideration of social

stereotyping, fat liberation perspectives, or the oppression of those who are different” (p. 215).

Implicit curriculum. Although there is a formal curriculum in place for teachers to follow, “actual practices may present a different reality” (Brady, 2004, p. 353). However disabling the explicit curriculum can be for fat students, the hidden curriculum can further privilege some bodies over others. Through posters, videos, and social anti-fat attitudes, schools continue to “help” fat children through promoting food plans and exercise initiatives. These strategies perpetuate the ideas of health as determined by these two factors that allegedly control weight and imply that those of heavier weights must be unhealthy individuals who lack the willpower to wield control (Greenleaf et al., 2006). Fat students’ alleged lack of power appears to be one way to use the body to negotiate social hierarchy among adolescents (Taylor, 2011).

Another way in which the implicit curriculum can legitimize fat oppression is through classroom furniture. Hetrick and Attig (2009) identify classroom contents, particularly chairs attached to desks, which draw unnecessary attention to and thereby marginalize fat students who struggle to fit into the chairs or must sit through class uncomfortably. To challenge the homogeneity enforced by these desks, they asked a class of seated students to reflect upon their experience with that desk in relation to shape, comfort, and oppression, and the ensuing comments either legitimized fat oppression or challenged it. Many participants placed blame on fat individuals for their discomfort, that is, that it was their fault for being fat rather than the one-size-fits-all chairs. In contrast, others found the question a revelation of oppression of the one-size-fits-all ideology (for those who happen to be that one size).

Another aspect of the hidden curriculum is the use of BMI in educational practices, policies, and research. Even researchers who are concerned about weight victimization use BMI or talk about “healthy” weight. For example, although her research examines the emotional damage caused by weight victimization, Taylor (2011) nonetheless used BMI as a measure of student health and used terminology such as “healthy weight” (p. 182), which reinforces the problematic approach of defining one’s health according to weight. Likewise, Puhl et al. (2011) call for improved health promotion in schools to address elevated obesity rates. I would argue that these researchers’ use of obesity discourse and using BMI as a measure of health is highly ironic and counterproductive. We need to disrupt unrealistic thin ideals, the notion that there is a “correct” or “normal” body weight, and the assumption that fat youth are automatically unhealthy. We should educate for fat acceptance and the adoption of educational practices that foster health at any size.

Fat Bullying

As noted above, in both the explicit and implicit curricula, schools contribute to fat oppression (Wykes & Gunter, 2004). Further, social environments within schools perpetuate the glorification of thinness and the ridicule of people who are derisively described as fat (Gesser-Edelsburg & Endevelt, 2011). Like other forms of oppression, fatphobia is dehumanizing. Freire (1970) notes that at the root of oppression is a failure to acknowledge another as a subject, as a person. The dehumanization of fat youth is enacted through fatphobic bullying and fat shaming, both of which can have serious negative influences on self-esteem, safety in schools, and school achievement (Weinstock & Krehbiel, 2009). Although bullying programs and policies are omnipresent now, albeit

with mixed results (Walton, 2005), bullying of fat students has become rampant and weight-based oppression is rarely acknowledged in schools (Puhl et al., 2011).

Walton (2005) questions why bullying continues within schools in the face of a proliferation of conferences, studies, and policies aimed at addressing it. He argues that what is often missing is an analysis of power and root causes. Bullying is not an isolated act of aggressive or violent behaviour, and the targets of bullying are predictable because they tend to be members of oppressed groups. Many schools choose to punish students who bully, or administer anti-violence education to students as a proactive method, but these focus on individual behaviour rather than addressing the rationale underlying bullying behaviours in the first place, that is, the targeting social difference. Walton asserts that this individualistic notion of bullying absolves those indirectly involved of any guilt; bullying is seen as an isolated event rather than thriving on systemic and cultural ideologies. Walton argues that addressing bullying on a micro level is insufficient and therefore ineffective. Applying his ideas to fat bullying, it seems the case that fat bullying cannot be resolved with the quick fix of punishing bullies who act on ingrained fatphobic ideologies; instead, the fatphobia that fuels fat bullying and fat shaming needs to be challenged.

Peers. School is a social organization where youth construct their identities and values. As such, schools play an inherent role in legitimizing privileged and oppressed bodies. Brady's (2004) study investigated students who "form distinctive status hierarchies that are based on socio-economic status, ethnicity, participation in co-curricular activities, membership on school teams, and clothing styles, among other factors" (p. 354). Although Brady (2004) did not explicitly mention body size as a

determinant of status, students in his study identified “jocks” as the peer group who received the most positive attention of teachers. These athletic students met social norms, antagonized students from different groups, and were positioned at the top of the school’s social hierarchy (Brady, 2004).

Teachers and administrators’ privileging of jocks is further maintained through fat bullying, including in the gymnasium. Physical educators often reinforce negative fat stigma and, intentionally or not, discourage fat youth from participating. Given weight-based oppression in the physical education environment, it is no wonder that many students tend to avoid class, consequently “reinforc[ing] peer perceptions that they are non-athletic, which may contribute to a lack of peer acceptance of overweight youth” (Peterson et al., 2012, p. 183). It can also reinforce notions that fat students are not attending class *because* they are fat, ignoring the fact that they have been marginalized. Further, Greenleaf et al., (2006) speculate that fat youth are less motivated in physical education classes because “overweight youth who feel they have little control over their weight may see physical activity as pointless” (p. 550). While this speculation is problematic because it presumes that weight is controllable and ignores weight stigmatization as a potential cause for lack of motivation in the gym, it does point to the complexity of the issue.

Fat oppression does not just occur in physical education as jocks are privileged in all aspects of school (Brady, 2004). Those who do not conform to the ideal body image often experience weight-based teasing (Taylor, 2011). In her study, Taylor discovered two forms of teasing among her student participants: direct and indirect. Direct teasing is targeted at fat youth but hidden from adults to evade discipline and responsibility; for

example, students recalled being told to avoid vending machines because they did not need the extra food. This kind of teasing reinforces the belief that weight is solely based on food intake and exercise, and fat shaming is directed at the individual.

Indirect teasing can take the form of gossip, spreading rumours, and whispering near the victimized individual (Taylor, 2011). An example would include peers gathering in tight circles to call fat people poor (as if being poor should also be a source of shame), or describe how big the targeted student appears (Taylor, 2011; Thomas & Irwin, 2009). One form of teasing is not necessarily more or less harmful than the other; most targets feel teased regardless. With both types of teasing, teachers and administrators seldom witness it in their schools. Further, participants in Taylor's (2011) study who were considered a "healthy weight" also reported being bullied because they did not meet the thin ideal portrayed in the media.

Peterson et al. (2012) described three similar types of bullying: verbal teasing, social exclusion, and physical aggression. They, too, found that all forms of bullying were used against fat youth with little intervention by school staff. Greenleaf et al. (2006) also acknowledge the higher likelihood of fat youth to experience social marginalization, bullying, and an overall low school quality of life. In that study, students held negative stereotypes about fat youth while projecting positive qualities on thin people, regardless of gender and ethnicity. Fat students were regarded as lazy, lonely, and ashamed, and participants reported that they were less likely to socialize with fat individuals, therefore isolating them from the larger peer groups.

Puhl et al. (2011) support Weinstock and Krehbiel's (2009) assertion that fat youth are often targets of bullying. Their study of adolescent observations of, and

reactions to, weight-based teasing noted that direct teasing was prevalent, especially during physical activities and lunch periods in the cafeteria. They found that fat students were being called names, ignored, avoided, harassed, and excluded from social activities. Further, students with negative dispositions toward fatness were less likely to intervene while witnessing fat shaming.

Greenleaf et al. (2006) concluded that fat youth face challenges based on poor peer relations, which I find oversimplifies the problem of fat bullying, reducing it to an issue of social skills in youth generally and simultaneously placing blame on the apparent social ineptitude of fat youth. In contrast, Weinstock and Krehbiel (2009) argue that fat youth will encounter some form of bullying, discrimination, and prejudice regardless of their social competency. They argue that fat bullying remains a neglected issue because it is tolerated.

Many people, including researchers in the field, still believe that weight is controllable and that fat bullying can act as a motivator for fat youth to change their presumed unhealthy lifestyles. This could explain the failure of teachers to recognize the prevalence of fat bullying in classrooms (Taylor, 2011). Teachers may not recognize their part in perpetuating the problem. And some may themselves be bullies and certainly not fostering a safe and inclusive classroom. Weinstock and Krehbiel (2009) report that fat students had a higher absentee rate than average weight students, particularly in physical education classes. Unfortunately, administrators may see this absenteeism as further reinforcement of the fat and lazy stereotype, without considering other reasons for student absences.

Teachers and school administration. Brady (2004) suggests that peer tolerance of bullying is due in part to student observations of how school administrators and teachers interact with and treat students. It is evident that fat students often experience various forms of fat bullying by their peers. However, it is even more disturbing to realize how teachers and school administrators not only tolerate, but also participate in, fat bullying. For example, many physical educators have misguided ideas, holding negative stereotypes that impact the way they treat fat youth (Peters & Jones, 2010). How teachers conduct their physical education classes and the manner of their feedback to fat students can reinforce negative stereotypes that are easily noticed by observant students (Peterson et al., 2012). Underestimating fat youth's abilities in physical education and holding higher expectations and respect for "normal" students is undoubtedly part of the problem (Peterson et al., 2012).

Teachers and school staff also can legitimize the student social hierarchy. For example, within physical education classes, teachers often segregate groups of students according to their perceptions of students' physical abilities and skill sets, giving more positive attention to jocks (Brady, 2004). Such distribution of attention does not go unnoticed and can influence what students consider to be socially accepted methods of interacting with other students; when teachers isolates students from others, students model this behaviour by excluding other students from their social group (Brady, 2004). Ultimately, rejection from one group "serves to enhance perceptions of exclusion from membership in the school community" (Brady, 2004, p. 363).

When physical aggression ensues between and among students, teachers are usually quick to intervene and mete out punishment to those involved (Mishna, Scarcello,

Pepler, & Wiener, 2005). However, teachers do not always intervene in specific types of bullying (Twemlow, Fonagy, & Sacco, 2006). In a study about weight-related teasing in physical education, Li and Rukavina's (2012) student participants reported that 55% of teachers who witnessed fat bullying ignored it, laughed at it, or advised the victim how to cope with it. As a result, trust was lost between the targeted students and those teachers. Li and Rukavina surmise that teachers are not prepared to address issues of fat bullying or foster inclusive classrooms for fat students while teaching physical education. Likewise, Mishna et al. (2005) interviewed teachers about their understandings of bullying and found that teachers did not know how to tackle indirect teasing, such as when some girls gossip and twist the truth. Further, their study revealed that the "majority of teachers reported that they did not receive training on bullying" (p. 728).

Peterson et al. (2012) also examined teachers' and coaches' interventions in any form of bullying. They found that coaches and teachers intervened most often when overweight girls were being bullied and found that female teachers were more likely to intervene. They speculate that female teachers are more empathetic to victimization of females. I propose that the empathy stems from an understanding of the harsh judgement and expectations placed on women to be a certain size, rather than women naturally being more empathetic.

Fat bullying of girls. Most studies examine both sexes and often compare the victimization of girls to boys (such as Griffiths, Wolke, Page & Horwood, 2005; Wang, Iannotti, & Luk, 2010). For instance, Griffiths et al. (2005) analyzed the different effects of fat bullying on youth, and found that fat boys could either be overt bullies or victims of bullying whereas fat girls were simply more likely to be victims. Another study found

that girls tend to be more susceptible to fat bullying than boys, and that they experience more verbal abuse than physical abuse because of their weight (Wang et al., 2010).

Similarly, another study of fat Ontario youth determined that physical bullying was used against boys while relational bullying (gossip and exclusion) mostly targeted fat girls (Kukaswadia, Craig, Janssen, & Pickett, 2011).

Thomas and Irwin (2009) noted how boys in their study were less worried than girls about the negative weight stigma, but nonetheless “view their weight as an impediment in social activities, which negatively influenced their self-esteem” (p. 113). Hargreaves and Tiggemann (2006) specifically examined boys’ body image, thinking they would find boys expressing similar concerns as girls. Instead, their results indicated that boys felt they were not much influenced by social media and popular culture, and they tended to focus on singular aspects of their body, predominantly muscularity (Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2006). There appears to be one dominant ideal for contemporary males in Western culture (i.e., muscular, neither fat nor thin), nonetheless heavier and stockier men are featured more readily and positively in popular culture than women and they escape much of the fatphobic interrogation to which women are subjected. It is partially for this reason that I focus my study on fatphobia among girls.

Wojtowicz and von Ranson (2011) conducted a study on general bullying of girls that included some attention to weight-related teasing; they found that adolescent girls being bullied for their weight were inevitably more dissatisfied with their weight and internalized the thin ideal as a result. Clearly, there is a growing literature on fat bullying, but as yet, few researchers have yet to grapple with the institutionalized perpetuation of fatphobic ideologies and their impacts on girls.

Theoretical Framing of Research

This literature review thus far has covered many areas relevant to the fat bullying of girls in schools and my analysis of the literature indicates that the curriculum and school environment acculturates youth to the fatphobic culture that thrives today. Although some provincial curricula are beginning to challenge the myths around weight and health to encourage a positive body image, there still remain physical educators who do the opposite and continue to perpetuate an oppressive environment for fat youth. Peterson et al. (2012) assert that there is a pressing need to re-educate teachers about the negative impacts of fat bullying and to urge adult staff to intervene. However, as Walton (2005) argues, confronting fat bullying in an individualistic way does not address the root problem. Without a critical theoretical framework, thin and fit bodies continue to maintain certain advantages over fat students within the school environment (Cameron et al., 2014).

This is why critical pedagogy is particularly helpful as it best deconstructs normalcy and the arrangements of privilege in school settings. Schools are sites that mirror as well as shape reality, and critical pedagogy provides tools for dismantling structures of power (Bruno-Jofre & Zaldivar, 2012). Although Freire (1970) argued that only oppressed groups are able to make change for themselves, nonetheless “conventionally, the teacher is responsible for protecting the learner” (Blumenfeld Jones, 2004, p. 276). Critical pedagogy enables teachers to resist becoming simply “information deliverers” (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 108) and instead to actively help create conditions for all their students to learn and to flourish.

Given my focus on girls in schools, feminist approaches to critical pedagogy that recognize that sexism still exists within Western society are very important. Espinosa (2003) noted the different expectations held for boys and girls in her community and how girls were strictly monitored within and beyond schools. Indeed, both Espinosa (2003) and Smith Crocco (2001) articulate how schools are sites where gender roles are developed. Smith Crocco (2001), in particular, discusses the existence of misogyny in schools and how most teachers are not prepared to address the social issues facing girls and boys, placing higher value on masculine stereotypical attributes. Critical pedagogy, particularly that with a feminist emphasis, can initiate the process of dissecting these double standards.

Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012) warn against viewing any oppression as a single issue, however, because then “the broader patterns become obscured” (p. 83). From observations of her own classroom, Espinosa (2003) saw that both race and class heightened the obstacles facing girls, and realized she needed to also address how those oppressions intersect. Similarly, I argue that sexism does not stand in isolation from fat oppression and an intersectional analysis is required. As one disturbing example, Prohaska and Gailey (2009) collected data from men who refer to fat women as “hogs” and “road beef” and who participate in a competition called “hogging” which is the competitive pursuit of fat women for sexual purposes. Their sizeist, sexist, speciesist language objectifies and devalues animals and all women, not just fat women. Another example along similar lines that comes to mind is the television series “Here Comes Honey Boo Boo” that follows a pageant toddler and her family; the series focuses on and exploits their weight, low socio-economic status, and lack of education. Further, noting

that the family owns a pet pig, the media has delighted in making disparaging comparisons of the pet and the family.

A “fat pedagogy” (Russell et al., 2013) that is influenced by critical pedagogy and feminist pedagogy must include an intersectional analysis that makes connections between oppressions. Fat pedagogy could disrupt fat oppression and teach fat acceptance if teachers were taught to reflect on their use of obesity discourse, their reproduction of fat oppression in health and physical education and other sites of learning, and their privileging of some bodies over others (Russell et al., 2013). Certainly, disrupting fat bullying would need to be part of a fat pedagogy.

As yet, there has been no other examination of the effects of fat bullying on those who later decide to become teachers, so my research contributes to filling that gap. In particular, I wanted to know how pre-service teachers who have been fat bullied themselves understood their experiences and how those experiences might influence their own teaching as well as their responses to fat bullying of their own students. I wondered whether pre-service teachers who had been bullied themselves still reproduce fatphobia or would they critically engage youth in an analysis of the systemic oppression of fat bodies?

Chapter Three: Methodology and Methods

My study focused on the experiences and pedagogical intentions of six female pre-service teachers who had been fat bullied in school. As a reminder, three central questions guided my research:

1. What were female pre-service teachers' experiences with fat bullying in elementary and/or secondary school?
2. How did their peers, teachers, and administrative staff participate in or respond to this fat bullying?
3. What were the pedagogical implications for them as learners, and what will be the pedagogical implications for them as future teachers?

Methodology

I used a qualitative approach and analyzed six female pre-service teachers' retrospective accounts of being bullied on the basis of being labeled fat and their future plans for addressing fat bullying as teachers in the future. As illustrated in the literature review, little research has been done to investigate the educational implications of the systemic targeting of fat youth, including the professional impacts on those who later become teachers. A qualitative research methodology was ideal for allowing me to “focus on discovering and understanding the experiences, perspectives and thoughts of participants” (Harwell, 2011, p. 148).

Theoretically and methodologically, I took inspiration from critical theory in general, and critical pedagogy, in particular, given its work to unveil and challenge oppression, and to empower marginalized people (Fay, 1987; Kincheloe, 2005). Taking a critical approach helped me examine power structures that oppress some and privilege

others (Freire, 1970; Kincheloe, 2005). Critical pedagogy critiques and challenges society and recognizes that education, particularly schooling, often reinforces the status quo (Kincheloe, 2005). It is based upon the assertion, then, that all education is political, not neutral, though many people assert that it is or should be, and insists that social justice should be a goal of education (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). Grounding my research in critical pedagogy meant that I had to frame my research questions while being, as Kincheloe (2005) puts it, “wary of the goals schools embrace and the ways they engage particular individuals and groups” (p. 13). Thus, critical pedagogy allowed me to consider the conditions of schooling as a mirror of society where fatness is stigmatized and fat bullying is mostly seen as socially acceptable.

A foundation of fat studies is critical theory (Wann, 2009), which provided a theoretical framework that informed my analysis of the impacts of fatphobia on young women in school. A feminist lens further supported my investigation given my emphasis on the experiences of girls. The field of fat studies largely grew out of the feminist movement and certainly recognizes the policing of women’s bodies (Wann, 2009). A feminist perspective was necessary to critically examine fat oppression of female students and interrogate school settings that legitimize and tolerate the victimization of female students (Olesen, 2000). Further, given my interest in intersectional analyses that make connections between and among oppressions, research informed by critical pedagogy, fat studies, and feminism allowed for a more sophisticated analysis than one of these frameworks would alone. Together, these informed both the content of my research and my methodological choices, such as wanting to privilege the voices of the marginalized

(i.e., women who had been fat bullied) and needing to pay attention to intersectionality when analyzing data, both of which I will discuss below.

Critical discourse analysis. A simple definition of discourse analysis is the descriptive examination of a written or spoken text (Gee, 2010). As Gee elaborates, discourse analysis requires more than exploring the meaning of language in a simplistic way. Cruickshank (2012) suggests that it “consists of a description, interpretation, explanation and—in some variants also critique of discourses, including their development and what consequences they have for the phenomenon under study” (p. 39). Given that I wanted to examine the power relations around fatness that are negotiated within school contexts, a critical approach to discourse analysis made sense for my research. Fairclough, Mulderrig, and Wodak (2011) asserted that critical discourse analysis allows for an examination of how particular institutions underpin certain discursive practices that affect society.

I asked the female pre-service teachers who participated in my research to describe their experiences of being fat bullied and how they perceived others responding to it. I then analyzed their responses in light of how schools either legitimize or disrupt fatphobia. Furthermore, I wanted to investigate how my research participants themselves might reinforce or challenge fatphobia personally and professionally. Using critical discourse analysis, I was able to study “the relationships between text, discursive practice and social practice” (Cruickshank, 2012, p. 41).

Kincheloe (2005) asserts that teachers form their teaching philosophy from lived experiences. This highlights why it was important to inquire into the fat bullying experiences that may influence pre-service teachers’ future teaching philosophies and

practices. Critical discourse analysis helped me explore how they have made meaning of their past experiences, particularly as they ponder their own teaching philosophies.

Role of the Researcher

Grounded in fat studies, feminism, and critical pedagogy, I aimed to explore fat bullying as a systemic inequality reproduced in schools, and my eventual goal was, and is, to challenge fat oppression. Recognizing that my role as the researcher conferred power on me in relation to my participants (Creswell, 2009), I wanted to ensure that I did not further marginalize or disempower the participants. I thus worked to build a positive rapport with participants by sharing my rationale for doing this research, and for the four who were curious, shared my earliest memory of being bullied for my weight.

Additionally, during recruiting presentations and interviews, I wore non-constricting and conservative clothing to conceal my body shape as I wanted to prevent, as much as possible, participants making comparisons between my body and theirs given feelings of body consciousness come to the surface when discussing topics of body weight (Salk & Engelm-Maddox, 2011). While I still consider myself fat, others may not and I did not wish to draw attention to my size.

In my B.Ed. program, I did not encounter critical pedagogy and I graduated unprepared to challenge bullying in a more systemic way. I suspected that many of my participants would be similarly unprepared and I refrained from being judgemental of any fatphobic or naïve comments, given I was in their shoes not so long ago. (Happily, one participant in particular surprised me with her theoretical sophistication). I came to my research from a particular standpoint, which is that I endorse the fat acceptance movement (of which only one of my participants had heard). In attempting to avoid

influencing participants, I tried to remain diligent about my choice of words. As one example, fat studies propose reclaiming the word “fat” as a physical descriptor (Wann, 2009), but most participants were sensitive to the word because of the negative connotations, so I refrained as much as possible from using it in my communications with them (i.e., in recruitment letters, consent forms, and interviews themselves). Instead, I tended to use medical terms such as overweight and obese, solely because these words are more mainstream even though I personally see them as problematic.

Participants

Six female pre-service teachers seeking certification in the Primary/Junior Division at the Orillia campus of Lakehead University gave their consent to participate in this study. Table 1 provides demographic information for each participant identified by their chosen pseudonym. All are from cities and towns in southern Ontario.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

<i>Participant's Pseudonym</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Self-Identified Ethnicity</i>
Sandra	36	Canadian-Italian
Kim	24	White
Rachel	28	Jewish
Sharon	29	Caucasian
Cece	21	Italian
Alexa	38	Canadian-East Indian

Methods

I used one source of data: qualitative interviews of participants, which are described below.

Interviews. Cruickshank (2012) argues that a “qualitative interview is an excellent method if [researchers] want to gain insight into the intentions, feelings,

purposes and comprehensions of the interviewee” (p. 42). Therefore I chose to interview six female pre-service teachers who had personal experiences with fat bullying in school. This was a purposeful sample (Patton, 2002) given I specifically recruited females who had had these experiences.

All participants were recruited from the Professional Year BEd program on the Orillia campus of Lakehead University. Recruitment took some time, but eventually a sufficient number of volunteers stepped forward from the Orillia campus. (My back-up plan was to interview people from the Thunder Bay campus and I even sent out a preliminary recruitment email to prospective participants there, although I was hesitant to do so as the interview would have had to happen at a distance rather than in person).

Contact was initiated through forwarded e-mails (Appendix A) and classroom visits where I introduced the topic of my research, criteria for participation, the time required for an interview, and my personal contact information. Criteria for participation were:

- Female
- Lakehead pre-service teacher
- Victim of fat bullying in elementary and/or secondary school

After potential participants contacted me, I sent them a description of the study (Appendix B) and the consent form (Appendix C). Once their consent was given, I sent them an electronic copy of the interview questions (Appendix D) one day prior to the interview to give them time to reflect on their experiences, in hopes that they would be better prepared to respond to questions in depth.

The interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions. Using a semi-structured format allowed me to pose impromptu questions and probing statements based on their responses (Creswell, 2009). This method gave me the opportunity to extrapolate

information from the interviews on how discursive practices may have reinforced their conceptions and intentions. Having shared my own experiences of fat bullying, I worked to ensure that the interview maintained a conversational tone and I inserted my personal stories when the participant appeared to require some reassurance that I was not judging them. In those rare instances, however, I tried to keep my own stories to a minimum to ensure that it was *their* story that I was hearing.

The pre-service teachers I interviewed ranged in size and body shape. Some had lost weight and reached their desired weight goal, some were in the process of losing weight, and others were comfortable with, and accepting of, their current size. While asking questions about fat bullying and body image, body consciousness and insecurities definitely surfaced. How participants perceived my body may have impacted their willingness to share their experiences with me in various ways: some may have been reassured that I identify myself as heavier whereas others may have considered me too small to be “really” considered fat. Since I could not stop them from seeing me in whatever way made sense to them, beginning the interview by sharing that I had experience with being fat bullied as a student was integral to gaining some trust.

Two audio-recording devices were used to tape interviews; one primary device and a second as back-up. I conducted each interview in a privately enclosed office space on campus due to the confidential and sensitive nature of the interview. I had initially thought that the interviews would last between 45-60 minutes in length for optimal and in-depth responses to questions and further probing, but found in reality that the interviews ranged from 20 minutes to 116 minutes depending on how much the participant wanted to share. Following interview transcription, I emailed follow-up

questions to clarify or develop responses further and all participants responded quickly and thoughtfully.

I transcribed all of the interviews and once transcripts were complete, I asked each participant to review the document as a form of verification and to ensure that they were indeed comfortable letting me use the information that they had shared with me in the interview. All participants reviewed and returned their transcripts with few changes required: one participant added some information to complete her ideas, and another participant requested more anonymity for the teachers she mentioned. These changes were heeded.

Data analysis. Following transcription, I read through each transcript once without stopping. Then I read through the transcript a second time highlighting possible emergent themes in different colours. I also made notes in the margin of words, phrases, or ideas that stood out to me as reinforcing fatphobic discourse. Reading through the transcript a third time, I rewrote the margin notes onto a separate piece of paper and began categorizing these notes further into themes. After some lumping and splitting, I finally settled on five themes that became the basis of my findings chapter.

I initially wrote about each theme in no particular order, bringing together direct quotations from the transcripts as well as highlighting any fat-positive, fatphobic, or obesity discursive practices. Using critical discourse analysis, it was important to highlight any language or incidents where fatphobia was being reproduced or challenged to ensure I properly addressed my research questions.

I encountered one challenge in my analysis. Many of the stories intersected with other themes, which certainly made sense given my desire for a nuanced understanding

and my interest in intersectional analyses, but caused me some angst as I wanted to ensure I did not become redundant in my themes and, later, in my writing.

Limitations

There are some obvious limitations to this research. First, my findings are limited to the small group of women who participated and can be said to apply to a broader audience, but only tentatively. Given I am seeking depth rather than breadth for illumination of an under-researched phenomenon, that is appropriate. In the end, readers will determine how well my results resonate with their own experiences and contexts. Second, the interviews were primarily based on retrospective accounts thus were more susceptible to the challenges of memory. Many participants struggled to remember one detail or another relating to a specific experience, but what they did remember certainly reflected what in these incidents had stayed with them over the years. Given I am particularly interested in how experiences of fat bullying influences the practices of future teachers, these retrospective accounts were nonetheless quite useful and set the stage well for discussing their future plans as teachers.

Ethics

Following approval from Lakehead University Research Ethics Board (#1463386) as well as permission from the Chair of Education at the Orillia campus, recruitment of participants began near the end of September of the 2013/2014 school year. When participants expressed interest in my study after being contacted through e-mail (Appendix A) or after I visited their classroom, they received an official letter (Appendix B) describing my study and the nature of their potential involvement, and a detailed consent form (Appendix C) to read and sign if they remained interested. In this letter, the

protection of their rights during the study were noted, including a guarantee of confidentiality, and a notice that they could refuse to answer any question and could withdraw from the study at any time. Upon receiving their signed consent forms, I arranged for a mutually agreeable interview time that was held in a private office kindly lent to me by a colleague on campus. One day prior to their interview, participants received a copy of the interview questions (Appendix D). All of this material was exchanged via email. Participants delivered their consent forms to me in person.

Face-to-face interviews were the primary source of data collection. I had received permission from all participants to contact them via email if I needed to ask them more questions for further information or clarification. I did so with all participants and the email conversation needed was minimal. All data and participants' identities have been, and will be, kept confidential, with only my supervisor and I having access to raw data. Participants chose personal pseudonyms so that they could remain anonymous in the thesis itself and in any future presentations or publications.

There were minimal risks associated with this study. However, because participants shared intimate and sometimes uncomfortable stories, it was therefore difficult for me to plan for the impact this disclosure might entail during or after an interview (Patton, 2002). Those participants who did become teary during the interview had access to tissues and were advised of the counselling services employed by Lakehead University should they desire to contact them. No participant became overly distressed and to my knowledge, none felt a need to follow up with counselling services.

There were also potential benefits to participants of this study, such as the participant becoming aware of how their knowledge and experience could help address

future bullying in schools. Participating in the interview also appeared to be useful to some of the participants personally in giving voice to the bullying they experienced.

The Faculty of Education at Lakehead University will store data for five years in their secure storage area that houses faculty and graduate student data and other confidential research materials, after which it will be destroyed. Upon completion of the thesis, copies of the results of this study will be made available to the participants who requested it.

Chapter Four: Findings

Following data analysis, I discerned five themes from my analysis of the interviews conducted with the six participants on their experiences of fat bullying and its implications for their future practice as teachers. The first theme focuses on participants' conceptions of health, including contrasts between their explicit definitions of health and how they otherwise talked about health throughout the interview. Their future plans for teaching health are also part of this theme. The second theme focuses on their experiences of fat bullying in physical education classes, and the attitudes of, and their interactions with, peers, teachers, and principals in those environments. The third theme is similar but focuses on their experiences in other school settings. The fourth theme focuses on the participants' discussion of who they felt was responsible for the bullying or who should be held accountable. The final theme focuses on the participants' plans for addressing fat bullying and how well they feel their teacher education has prepared them to do so.

Theme One: Concepts of Health

To critically analyze participants' discourse around weight, I asked each of them questions about how they understood health and what, if any, connections they made between health and weight. I was particularly interested in how they imagined conceptions (or misconceptions) about health might fuel fat bullying.

Explicit definitions of health. All participants were asked directly to define health. Perhaps not surprisingly, five of the six participants included the typical equation of eating healthy and staying active in their definition. For instance, Cece defined health as:

...eating healthy, eating foods that make you feel good. I know sometimes I have the problem that I eat something and then I feel heavy or I feel gross afterwards. So preventing eating those kinds of foods... I live in an apartment and I have to walk up four flights of stairs when I'm huffing and puffing at the top. When I used to huff and puff, I knew I wasn't healthy.

Cece's definition of health primarily focused on eating healthy foods and physical fitness to feel good. She went on to define health by what it was not, that is, a person would not be healthy if they could not do certain things and she specifically used her inability to do certain things as a determinant of her own lack of health. She also mentioned that not having to "worry about" her inabilities was a sign of health.

Alexa similarly described health as: "feeling very strong and... giving my body what it needs, not what my mind thinks it wants." When asked about what she meant by "needs," she responded:

I know that I need my fruits and my vegetables, the kind of, the healthy foods. I know that it's okay to have chocolate sometimes, but in my mind I—especially if I'm studying—I feel like it's almost uncontrollable. I will just eat and eat and eat. Even if it is "healthy foods," it's still almost uncontrollable... Health to me is not being in that phase. I guess, having more control, feeling like I have more control over what is actually happening in my life.

Not only were healthy foods important to Alexa, then, but also a sense of control was required for her to feel strong. Kim too inferred a sense of control in her definition of health:

I define health as eating healthy and living your life healthy, in a healthy environment per se, kind of just watching, for me personally, watching what I eat, and exercise... and that includes drinking and smoking and that kind of stuff too.

Kim's definition of health requires her to self-monitor her food intake and activity levels. Balancing food and exercise were very important to Kim as she identified herself as being previously "overweight" and was happy to no longer be so.

The self-monitoring and sense of control was also echoed by two participants who mentioned mental wellbeing in their definitions of health. Alexa, very aware of her perceived need for control, separated mental and physical health and stated that one was healthy if one had a “good outlook” and was “comfortable with who you are.” In contrast, Rachel divided health into three categories, namely “mental, physical and emotional” in order to capture one’s overall health holistically rather than simply prioritizing one over the other. Interestingly, Rachel then referred to these categories as “those fears, those three fears mainly.” Her discourse about health was peppered with anxiety about not being healthy. Christine’s definition was similarly based on anxiety as she promptly defined health as being “disease-free.” She noted that she had found herself surrounded by peers her own age with various diseases; she felt different from them as she was disease-free thus she could consider herself healthy.

These five participants used words like “worry,” “watching,” “control,” “disease-free,” and “fears” when describing health. Their language evoked anxiety and images of self-monitoring that is not uncommon to weight loss endeavours. Cece concluded her definition of health with: “I guess, to me, health has to do with weight just because of my experience with my weight.” This was a commonality for five of the six participants.

Sharon was the only participant who did not mention food or anxiety directly in her response. When discussing her definition of health, she immediately referenced the Health at Every Size movement and began talking about thin people who can be unhealthy and fat people who can be healthy. She described health as having a strong body that can do what “it is supposed to do” and having good mental health where one is “happy” with one’s body.

Contradictions in conceptions of health. As participants shared their stories, sometimes ideas that contradicted their original definitions of health emerged, especially when asked specifically if their experiences of being bullied about their weight had changed or influenced their ideas of health.

Christine described how her ideas of health changed over time: “I probably dieted when I was in high school more than I do now. My image of health was all external until my thirties, and now it’s all about internal.” She noted that as a teenager she was influenced by what constituted an ideal body type, and dieted to try to achieve that. As an adult, however, she has focused on being disease-free, as noted above. She also added that, “Your outer body is a reflection of your inner body. It doesn’t have to be [one size]. It can be big or small, it doesn’t matter, but you can’t have belly weight because it’s very unhealthy.” Thus while Christine originally emphasized being disease-free as the marker of health and she seemed to accept different sizes as healthy, she nonetheless worried that belly weight was dangerous for one’s health.

Like Christine, all participants admitted to weight loss behaviours as youth, including dieting, excess activity, and bulimia. Each felt that fat bullying had driven them in their pursuit of being thin and thus to be “healthy.” Kim, who had not directly linked health and weight in her original definition, revealed later in our discussion that she wanted to lose weight because she thought she would not live long otherwise. However, Kim also began to think more critically about weight as she aged: “Your weight shouldn’t clarify your healthiness; regardless if you’re 100 lbs. or 200 lbs., you should still be eating healthy and exercising daily and going for walks and doing those things regardless of your weight, size, or number.” Still, contradictions emerged when she also reproduced

fatphobic messages throughout her interview. As one example, she stated, “Weight really restricts you of [sic] life.”

Rachel, who had given a holistic definition of health, provided compelling examples of how fat bullying itself could be unhealthy. She felt that the emotional impacts of bullying caused her body to contract a “violent stomach flu.” Yet, when she introduced the idea that some individuals celebrate their fatness, she said, “I also have a problem with embracing being unhealthy, and ‘the bigger you are, the more of you to love.’ I also have a problem with this mentality.” She argued that celebrating size “ignore[s] the fact that it does have really direct implications to your health and your body.” Although later in our discussion, she talked about how genetics and cultural backgrounds impacts weight, she still maintained that size denoted health.

Cece demonstrated a more complex definition of health when she used her boyfriend as an example of someone who she believes to be healthy despite his size:

You could still be healthy and active, and still be a bigger person. My boyfriend, he’s a bigger guy and he plays hockey, and he works out and he can keep up better than his thinner friends. So I guess it doesn’t really have to do with your weight or your size.

While Cece is accepting of her boyfriend’s size and recognizes that his healthy lifestyle does not affect him in regards to size, she nonetheless measures his capabilities in comparison to his thinner friends reinforcing the idea that thinness sets the standard. She also notes that “if he was sparking it a little bit more, then he would lose more weight” which demonstrates that she believes that one’s body weight is malleable.

Alexa also talked about size and weight while referring to health later in the interview. She initially said, “as much as I would love to be a smaller size, I need to be healthy.” Alexa was able to momentarily separate her size from health, but then when

referring to fat youth she might later teach, she said, “health is key, so if you’re young and you’re extremely overweight, it’s not healthy.”

Sharon was the only participant who maintained a “healthy at every size” attitude throughout the interview. She only wavered when she discussed how she might approach future fat students as a teacher when she talked about needing to teach them that health is an “equation” of balancing food intake and activity levels as well as helping them to understand how weight loss or weight gain works, implying it is absolutely controllable.

While not all of the participants originally included weight in their definitions of health, they all later referred to it in one way or another. As I will explore in the discussion, they are living in a fatphobic culture so this is not surprising, nor is the fact that some of them also made use of “obesity epidemic” discourse, as will be illustrated in the next section.

Obesity epidemic. In the fall term in which I interviewed them, four of the participants (Christine, Kim, Cece, and Rachel) were enrolled in a required B.Ed. course in Health and Physical Education. All four believed what they were taught in that course about the “obesity epidemic.” These four participants were particularly worried about this “epidemic” and used words such as the following to describe it: “prevalent,” “a problem,” “poignant,” and “preventable.” Rachel’s comments are a good example:

We see the stats and we see that the rate is something like a third of children or something. I don’t know what it is, but 20% of kids are considered overweight and obese. It’s frightening; it’s super frightening. I feel like I’m a living example of what it was like to find out too late.

While Rachel could not accurately relay the statistics or name the source of her information, she clearly felt fearful about the “epidemic” and defeated about her own size.

It was just not these four who were adamant that the obesity epidemic existed. Sharon also felt a sense of urgency about how she, as a teacher, could address the perceived problem, particularly by getting her future students to be more active. As well, Sharon, Kim, and Rachel labeled current children as sedentary compared to when they themselves were children. Each indicated they themselves had always played actively outdoors, which they did not think current children do. Additionally, Christine, Rachel, and Sharon attributed additives and preservatives in the foods as partly the cause of the epidemic, and Rachel and Sharon thought a lack of nutrition education was also a contributing factor. Ultimately, all of these participants were concerned about the alleged obesity epidemic and inferred that prevention of obesity in children was possible through simple nutrition and activity, reflecting healthy living discourse.

In contrast, Alexa seemed initially indifferent to the idea of an obesity epidemic. Nonetheless, she then went on to describe her experience in Korea.

Obesity is not very prominent, but over those last six years I was there, I was seeing that there were a lot of children coming in [to school] who were, by Korean standards, overweight. I wouldn't say that they were by our standards, but when I came back to Canada I realized that there really are a lot of overweight [youth in Canada].

Not one participant considered the negative impact terms like “obesity epidemic” could have on future students. Indeed, there was no evidence of any critical thinking at all about the “obesity epidemic”; rather, it appeared to be simply accepted as fact.

Health promotion. Given our discussions of what constituted health, I was curious to know how participants might want to promote health in their schools when they become teachers. I wanted to see if their experiences with fat bullying would enable

them to teach critically about health or whether they might be intent on reinforcing existing stereotypes about there being only one healthy weight.

All participants mentioned wanting to promote good nutrition and physical activity. Christine, Kim, Rachel, Sharon, and Cece spoke about what they perceived as a lack of nutritional information when they were students, so they wanted to emphasize nutrition with their students while all participants also included finding ways to incorporate daily physical activity.

Similarly, Kim and Sharon both said they would pay attention to students' lunches. For example, Kim suggested using a "positive reinforcement" tactic of doing a class scrapbooking activity that showcased those children who brought healthy lunches. Immediately after sharing that idea, she recognized the harm that could do in singling out children who did not have "good" lunches and suggested she would need to find an alternate activity that could help students create individual and confidential goals around lunches and activity levels. Sharon, too, also mentioned the importance of working individually and confidentially with students who needed help with nutrition and activity.

Cece wanted to emphasize the importance of telling students to love themselves as part of her own plans for health promotion. She believed:

It's important to be healthy and it's important to be active, but it's important to love yourself too. I don't know if maybe that's what the textbook tells you to do, probably not, but I feel like I want students to be happy and comfortable with themselves, and also by working out or by eating healthy and being more active, that's loving yourself.

Cece recognized that self-acceptance might not be in the curriculum, but she felt it was important and that choosing healthy food and being active was a way to show love for oneself, thus reproducing healthy living discourse.

Although the majority of participants had mentioned mental health in their initial definitions, only one participant, Alexa, explicitly mentioned it when discussing their plans for promoting health in schools. Alexa described her desire to have a safe space for students to vent problems to staff and to seek help and/or advice.

Theme Two: Physical Education and Activity in School Environments

None of my interview questions specifically asked about participants' experiences in their physical education classes or with school sports, yet the majority of participants described incidents of fat bullying in these environments. Participants described elementary and secondary physical education classes as negative experiences, both inside the gymnasium and outside on the track or in the field. Some participants also made reference to school sports teams, where they felt simultaneously privileged to be a part of the team while also feeling excluded. Finally, a couple of participants also mentioned the change room as a particularly damaging environment, given their bodies were on display and criticized. This theme, then, focuses on incidents of fat bullying that occurred in these environments as well as how peers, teachers, and/or administrative staff responded.

Gymnasium and outdoor field. There were many incidents shared by participants of bullying in these sites. To begin, Cece shared a memory of her Grade 9 gym class where all students had to keep track of their fitness levels (based on things like the number of crunches and push-ups they could do) and submit it to the teacher each day. The following day, the teacher returned their records and displayed the class average, requesting students to compare their personal results to this average. The final fitness task was to complete the "Beep Test" which involved repeatedly running the distance of 20 metres between time intervals allotted by a pre-recorded beep. As the test

continues, the time between beeps reduces thus forcing the runner to increase his/her speed. The test is meant to record one's aerobic endurance and fitness. Cece remembers "thinner girls" asking her how far she thought she could run: "We didn't even know the number scale of the Beep Test at this point. I'm, like, 'Oh, I'll try to get to the last number, I'll try.'" The girls kept pushing for answers and Cece tried to brush their questions off. Following the Beep Test, students recorded the results and the teacher calculated the average for students to assess their fitness level. As Cece was realizing her results were not as good as others, she recalls one girl known for being a bully approaching her:

I had my test and my paper, and it was full now at this point with all the averages ...and the girl ... ripped the paper out of my hand, but my paper ripped because I was holding onto it. She was, like, "You're being a bitch, why won't you give me your paper? Are you scared that your numbers are bad?" And then I started to cry... and I ran out of the class. No one came after me.

She acutely remembered that peers did not come to comfort her nor did the teacher look for her. Eventually, Cece returned to class in fear of getting in trouble for leaving class. Upon her return, Cece found the ripped pieces placed together on her desk. When she went to her teacher about it, she immediately gave her a new sheet of paper to refill. The teacher only asked Cece what was wrong when she submitted her new fitness record. Cece told the teacher what had happened, and the teacher said she would talk to the bully. However, the teacher never followed up with Cece and it was instead evident to Cece that the teacher did not address it immediately nor appropriately because as Cece was leaving the gymnasium, the bully called out, "Maybe if you lost a few, then you could do better on your fitness test."

Sharon similarly remembered being targeted in the gymnasium. Sharon identified herself as a very active child who liked sports, but as she got older the gymnasium started to feel like a torture room. The bullying in her early school years mostly took the form of exclusion and alienation. She believed it started when teachers allowed students to pick their own team members and students appeared to use appearance to determine physical ability. She was always picked last and teachers either never understood what was happening to Sharon or deliberately ignored it. As Sharon got older, the bullying included blatant name-calling and she remembers being told to “Run, fatty, run” and “Run, fatso.” Sharon also remembers that physical education that occurred outdoors on the track where there was even less teacher supervision was problematic:

You’re running a lap around the school and the teacher is 400m ahead of you, and you’ve got two girls beside you saying mean, mean things to you like, “Your ass jiggles when you run” [or] “I can see your cellulite.”

Sharon’s experience with physical education worsened in high school. She told a story of how girls made comments about her weight when they were outside playing field hockey. When Sharon was in net, many students took slap shots at her and she felt that was part of the bullying. When she got out of the net, she also hit slap shots toward the goalie’s face and used her stick to hit other girls’ legs in retaliation. During this game, the teacher only intervened when Sharon started fighting back. After recognizing that teachers were not going to help her, Sharon stopped trying as hard in her gym class:

I did not mind doing laps. I did not mind doing all the things in the class on a physical level. It was the fact that everyone else was there making fun of me when I did [the activities]. Put me in a gym alone and I would’ve been fine.

Rachel was the only participant who could not recall specific incidents of being bullied by peers in the gymnasium, but she very poignantly remembered the attitudes

teachers had toward her: “It wasn’t even my choice, it was, like, ‘There’s the bench’... and I would’ve actually really liked to participate.” In fact, Rachel asserts that she was very discouraged by teachers’ favouritism of athletic students and she felt “that if you weren’t gifted or skilled in that area you were disregarded. We teach that as ourselves as peers as kids, but then it’s very much reinforced by the teacher.”

Similarly, Kim recalls how the positive attention and recognition that her athletic siblings received had motivated her:

My sister and my brother went to the same school as I did; they were in the sports kind of groups, so all the teachers knew them as the athletic kids and what not, so I was, like, “Well, I want to do that.” So I kind of started joining in, and then I made friends and we’d all do healthy activities together and they were always so healthy, so that kind of forced me into that behaviour.

The attention her siblings received influenced Kim to make friends with other athletic students and mimic their behaviours. This was when she started her journey of weight loss in order to receive the benefits of that particular social group.

Sports teams. Two participants described their experiences of being on school sports teams. For example, Rachel briefly noted her participation on a sports team: “They let me on the volleyball team, but I never got to play. Then the next year I didn’t make it. Yeah, I was overweight, but I could move. Actually I was good at serving, I really liked it.” It is significant that Rachel felt she was “let” on the team rather than feeling that she belonged there. Rachel also felt that her weight was why she was not chosen to play on the court or why she did not make the team the following year, and it was clear that she was disappointed since she enjoyed the sport. She went on to question what the teacher’s priorities were: promoting activity or having a winning team? She quickly learned that

sports and physical activities were about competition thus felt discouraged from playing other team sports.

Alexa also described her experience with being on a sports team. She noticed the athletic hierarchy as well and when asked if there was anything in the education system that taught her that her weight would be an issue, she responded: “The emphasis they put on if you were on a sports team. You were the kind of end all and be all, and it was really great.” Alexa also reflected on the “try out” process. She remembered trying out for the rowing team, but on the day it was scheduled, she fell ill with bronchitis. The coach did not offer her a later chance to try out and she “got cut immediately.”

Alexa also recalled her experiences on the basketball team. She recognized the star players were the popular students and they were always the ones on the court. Alexa rarely got to play and when she did, other players would never pass the ball to her. She did not know if the coach noticed, but even if the coach had intervened (which Alexa thought was unlikely), nothing changed for her. She did not bother reporting how she was feeling excluded to her coach, “because in my mind, I can’t believe I’m even on the basketball team.” Alexa, like Rachel, did not believe that she belonged on a school team. Alexa also did not try out for sports after this experience: “I kind of knew I wouldn’t make it anyways because I was overweight, whereas all of the other stellar athletes and what not, were not. They were pretty fit.”

One participant shared her experience with a sports team outside the school environment. Sharon spoke positively about that experience, including the behaviour of coaches and other players. She assumed the reason why bullying did not happen in that environment was because everyone recognized she volunteered to be on this team and

“that maybe the size that you are has nothing to do with your physical activity level.” She also maintained positive relations with her coaches because, although playing certain positions were indeed based on skill level, the coaches always worked with the youth to develop the skills needed to eventually play these positions. It is telling that Sharon’s positive memories of physical activity only existed outside the school environment.

The girls’ change room. The previous environments enabled teachers and coaches to witness bullying and gave them opportunities to intervene (not that any did apparently). The change room, however, was a mostly unsupervised social environment. Although not a place where physical activity actually happens, it is nonetheless part of the physical education environment because students must enter it to transition from the classroom to the gym and where the body is particularly on display.

Kim mentioned the change room as an environment where fat bullying happened to her. She did not go into any detail, but she particularly remembered feeling “stuck” because she had a male teacher who obviously could never enter the room to witness the bullying. Likewise, Rachel did not share a specific incident inside the change room, but she remembers well her feelings at the time:

I can’t think of one instance, I just know that when I was in high school and we had to switch into our gym clothes—even though I was by no way grotesquely over, obese, I mean I was overweight, but you know—I used to have fears that I wouldn’t fit in the shirts... I was so paranoid about that stuff, and [I was] constantly just comparing myself relentlessly.

Although Rachel admits that she cannot remember a single instance of bullying inside the change room, the environment had created such a negative atmosphere that what Rachel remembered most was her fear and paranoia, and comparing herself to other bodies in the room.

Cece also addressed how changing clothes in an open change room in high school caused her to act and feel:

I remember that when I had gym days I would put my shorts underneath my track pants. Then I would just pull them down to have my shorts. Then I would pull them back up and then I would go to the bathroom during my next class or on my way to class and I would take my shorts off. I would fiddle with my shirt underneath to avoid taking it off. Now that I think about that, ... after that point I've always never once showed my body.

Cece addressed the effects of this by noting how she still does not feel comfortable showing her body, adding that, "I guess you take it with you forever, and you have to build your confidence again."

Sharon used similar strategies to avoid prying eyes, and she also identified an incident that stood out for her:

Grade 9 was definitely the worst part, because by that point you have to change in the change rooms and stuff. I always change in the corner, and somebody deliberately moved all of my stuff to the middle of the room so that I'd have to change in the middle of the room. Oh, and the girls that wanted to embarrass me locked all the bathroom stall doors, so that I couldn't change there. So I had to change in front of everybody, and I already felt bad about my body.

She felt singled out and clearly noted that it seemed acceptable to her peers to target fat youth and put them on display for more ridicule.

Alexa told me how she specifically took a physical education credit in the summer prior to grade 9 to avoid bullying. She felt "a little bit worried about being in the change room and actually just partaking in the gym class." But because it was a summer class, she could go straight to class from home already in her gym clothes and return home that way. She had a friend who joined her in this class for the same reasons, and having her there helped too. Alexa remembered feeling happy about not having to take Physical Education during the school year.

Theme Three: Other School Environments

The Health and Physical Education curriculum and pedagogy often place considerable focus on the body, and therefore it is not surprising that it can be a prime environment for fat bullying. Still, all participants had fallen victim to fat bullying in other school environments as well.

Classrooms. While the classroom typically places emphasis on academic ability rather than physical ability and teachers are present to supervise, fat bullying still occurred here and interfered with most of the participants' learning.

Kim, for example, found her bully to be more verbal outside the classroom where there was less teacher supervision, but bullying happened inside the classroom nonetheless; it was just subtler. She explained how, in elementary school, the bully would walk by her desk and discreetly pinch her arms or her side, and sometimes would "grab, like, a chunk of my body and just twist it." Kim felt that she was targeted because of her weight and the bullying reinforced her negative feelings about her weight. This bullying began to create constant fear in Kim; she said, "Sometimes it was enough to know [the bully] was there." She admitted that, "I'd rather [the bully] call me names where people see it compared to her being very discreet and pinching me where no one really noticed."

When Kim told her friends about the incident, "they were shocked that it was [this particular person] doing it ... because she came off as [a] goody two-shoes in the classroom, always [had] her schoolwork done, [and] really listened to the teacher." Kim's teacher never noticed the bruises from the pinching and, even if she had, she likely would never have suspected the bully was the culprit.

Cece similarly experienced physical bullying because of her weight. She recalled a boy constantly teasing her and poking her sides when she sat next to him in her elementary school classroom. She initially thought he was trying to be funny, but when he continued after her request to stop, she became more self-conscious and felt hurt. Like Kim, being poked because she was fat caused her to fixate on her weight. Cece also remembered being targeted for the food she was eating. One of her earliest memories of fat bullying was when she saw her peers staring at her lunchbox and remarking on how “full” it appeared. The comments occurred often enough that Cece asked her mom to put less food in the lunchbox saying that she never finished it all anyway.

Alexa also faced bullying in the classroom environment. One of her classes was located in an old portable building outside her school. Due to the nature of the building, it was not very sturdy and one boy took advantage of this fact. As Alexa walked into the portable, it shook as it did with every other student, but this boy used this opportunity to target Alexa’s weight by shouting, “Wow, that was a 9.7 on the Richter Scale,” comparing her walking to an earthquake. Other students were not targeted in this way. Alexa’s eyes welled up with tears and she was unable to concentrate for the rest of class. The teacher was apparently unaware of the incident even though present.

Sharon could not recall any instances of fat bullying in the classroom. She did, however, mention that she is apprehensive about being judged by her future students in her future classroom. Because she worries about her weight, she intends to rearrange her classroom lay-out so that she will not have issues moving throughout the classroom. She was the only participant to take the actual classroom space into consideration, but other participants also mentioned their fear of being judged by future students for their weight.

Recess settings. Recess is meant to give students a break from the classroom environment, but as students exit the building, they are entering a playground that is less supervised. As such, it was a place where participants experienced fat bullying as well.

Alexa's earliest memory of fat bullying was in Grade 3 when she was walking outside at recess time wearing her favourite dress, and an older student told her that she looked "pregnant in that dress." Clearly, it was not possible for her to be pregnant at that age, yet she was reminded that her body was perceived as being too big. No one witnessed the incident.

Christine likewise described an experience where she was leaving the school building alone as two other girls were entering it, and one called her "stumpy" and the other one laughed. Although looking back Christine felt the story seemed so minute and laughable, she reflected that the comment nonetheless had significantly affected her; she mentioned how she can still relive that moment readily even though twenty years have passed. She also recalled how she internally agreed with the bullies and spent time in front of the mirror questioning whether it was true. She thought about what being called stumpy meant: thick "like a tree, straight, no curvature, so yeah, I could probably see it." Just this one comment made Christine feel that she had to examine her body and she found it wanting.

Kim and Alexa were also bullied at recess time in elementary school. Kim was very clear about how she spent her recess time: "Recess was terrible, like, I'd always want to be in view of the teacher... so the teacher [could] see it." Both participants attempted to avoid their respective bullies and desperately hoped teachers would catch their bullies in the act. Alexa had a teacher she liked to talk to during recess time, and one

day they were discussing her upcoming graduation. Alexa mentioned how her dress required alterations, and her teacher replied, “Oh well, you’re just going to have to add a lot of material to your dress.” Alexa recalled taking that comment in a positive way, thinking it was good that the teacher could joke with her, but it also made her feel bad to have another person thinking she was fat. Alexa recognized now that a teacher who is in such an obvious position of power should not be making jokes about a child’s weight.

Clothing brands. Alexa’s need to alter her Grade 8 graduation dress connects with other participants who experienced exclusion and rejection because they were not wearing the “right” clothing brands or sizes. For example, Kim was specifically excluded from groups at recess time because of the clothing she wore and what she could not wear. The *Northern Reflections* brand often had comfortable clothing in Kim’s size, but her fellow students would tell her she could not spend time with them while wearing that brand. Kim recalls that her parents could afford to purchase other brands, but:

Certain places you can’t shop, because the sizes are just way too small and nothing fits you. That’s super frustrating ... when I remember when I was a kid, because you’re bigger you can’t wear stuff that everyone else can wear. So that’s going to bully you.

Kim described her memory of the popularity of the fuzzy and coloured *Gap* brand sweaters and how students would organize “*Gap* sweater days.” We discussed how excluded the brand made her feel given its limited selection of sizes as well as how excluded the people wearing that brand made her feel. Teachers seemed completely unaware of Kim’s feelings of exclusion.

Cece spoke of a similar time where she went to a store to buy a pair of jeans that “every girl at school had.” She remembered, “I came out, and I was waddling out trying to keep [the jeans] on and they’re not buttoned, [and] they’re not zippered.” Cece

described how experiences like that were pivotal to her social development and her desperate desire to “fit” into those clothes and the crowd who were proudly wearing those jeans:

I wanted the pants because everyone else had them, and I wanted that *TNA* jacket because everyone else had it, but I couldn't get it to zipper because I was bigger. I guess just all these little things in school...with my friends, I guess it has to do with fitting in. If I could have what they had then I would fit in. Obviously I couldn't have what they had because I was bigger, because I was fat.

Her lack of choice in clothing brands reinforced Cece's belief that her size was why she felt alienated from her peers. Not fitting into certain clothes reflected how she did not fit in at school. Like Rachel, Cece talked about how her body did not fit the clothing rather than that the clothing did not fit her.

Desirability. Because of being bullied for their weight, many participants felt unattractive to potential suitors. Four participants mentioned having measured their own worth through reference to being found attractive to males.

Cece had said while she remembered being bullied when she was younger, it did not seriously start to impact her self-esteem until a boy picked on her which then made her feel unattractive to males. She continuously saw that her thin friend was perceived as beautiful by males, observing that “she was basically a *Victoria Secret* model. Thin, and tall, and tanned... she always had the guy, and maybe I thought that looking nice and all that kind of stuff had to do with you having a boyfriend.” Cece then admitted that she had engaged in an unhealthy relationship with a boy in high school, which had a really damaging effect on her:

I started talking to him to make me feel better about myself, and he was the biggest jerk. It was a long distance relationship. It was the stupidest thing I could've ever done... I did it to make myself feel better, and even

though he was so mean to me, and I cried at least twice a week, and I knew that he was bad for me, I see now that it was for my self-esteem. I couldn't see it then but I see it now.

She admitted that his interest in her made her feel attractive at the beginning and had momentarily given her a sense of confidence, even though it was damaging to her in the long run.

Similarly, Sharon described how having a boyfriend in Grade 12 gave her some reprieve from bullying, not that the bullying stopped happening but she did not care as much about it because she had a boyfriend. (Sharon also mentioned the possibility that having a girlfriend could feel the same way, as the only participant who thought about more than heterosexual attraction).

...the marker of every fat girl, like when you can get a boyfriend or girlfriend. When you can get somebody else who's interested in you, on a romantic level and not just a friendship level, and they'll admit they're attracted to you.

Having a boyfriend/girlfriend was important to these participants because it was a public announcement that they could be attractive to, and indeed be accepted sexually by, someone.

This was echoed by Alexa's belief that her lack of a boyfriend at the time was due to her size. When she had noticed that a boy might be interested in her, she realized that she had pushed him aside because, "In my head I had already assumed that this could never happen because I'm fat. Why would he like me?" When the boy then appeared to give up on her, Alexa took that as proof of this, illustrating how much she had internalized.

Rachel also noted that fat bullying made her feel undesirable and she attributed some of her negative feelings about herself to how "no boys liked me, or the boys that

were nice to me seemed to always succumb to the pressure [to not do so because she was fat].” A definition of attraction through male attention became apparent to Rachel when she “saw the pretty girl, and she gets certain attention. Why can’t I be like that?”

Although teachers may not have responsibility to intervene in matters of individual attraction (although one can imagine this could be discussed in health class), they do need to make sure that they do not cause any additional harm. Rachel told a story about an experience involving a teacher that made her feel vulnerable at a school dance:

I remember a teacher forcing a guy to dance with me or, like, encouraging that and it’s kind of, like, we got round up with each other. I remember feeling very, very insecure. And I feel like it does a lot of damage to the girls, but I feel like it’s very a two-way street, but that it informs guys as well, very much. What is attractive and what is beautiful? And [the boys] respond to that, which is really messed up and wrong.

Rachel described how the teacher’s actions, in essence, informed her peers of who needed romantic assistance and who did not. As someone in a position of power, the teacher made an already uncomfortable situation for both Rachel and the boy worse.

Theme Four: Assigning Responsibility

When participants discussed their experiences with fat bullying, it was difficult to ignore whom they found responsible. In fact, it became important to them to decipher responsibility not so much to assign blame but in an effort to prevent future occurrences. The data revealed that participants did not blame one single party, but found different parties responsible for different reasons. It also became clear that participants struggled to stay consistent on who they thought was responsible for their protection.

Bullies and other peers. Many participants described the resentment they still felt towards their bullies as well as towards those who did not come to their aid. As a teenager, Sharon clearly identified her bullies as responsible for the bullying and her

subsequent retaliation. As previously noted, Sharon had begun to lash out against her tormentors on the field because she did not know how else to respond to the situation. She described how she started getting into fights with her bullies for teasing her about her weight and figured that she might as well use her size to her advantage, saying to the bullies, “My size can do a lot to you.” Sharon used violence as an outlet for her frustration, later feeling she had succumbed to the negative effects of being bullied. As an adult, Sharon was not proud of her behaviour, but she still was clear about whose responsibility it was in her mind: “It’s horrible that they turned me into what I see as a monster. That’s a mean kid.”

Rachel similarly took out her frustration on others. She said. “I became an aggressor. I wasn’t nice to people, and I bullied people back [about] their weight.” In contrast to Sharon, however, Rachel did not retaliate against her bullies. Instead she recounted a story about a girl who moved onto her street and wanted to be Rachel’s friend:

I made fun of her because I was so jealous of her and she was super skinny, not super, [but] you know, she was blonde and beautiful, and yeah, she does fit the stereotype. So I imitated that behaviour and I’m not proud of it ... I put her down and [said] that she was ugly, [and] that she didn’t have a body.

Bullying thus led both of these participants, as adolescents, to behave in retaliatory ways that, as adults, they were later embarrassed by.

Alexa did not outwardly retaliate, but she admitted that she was able to mentally reassure herself during incidents of bullying by pinpointing physical attributes of her bully that she found unappealing. Kim similarly took solace in her bully’s appearance:

I started losing weight, and she, this is going to sound bad, and she continued to get fat. I wanted to get skinnier just because she bullied me

because I was fat—if that makes any sense. Because every time I see her, I'm, like, "Damn you for calling me fat, now you're fat and I'm going to be skinny." I know that sounds horrible but it was kind of my mentality. "You bullied me for so long because I was fat and now you're fatter than I am, how dare you?" Even though in elementary school she was a bigger girl, it was always this satisfaction of knowing that, "I'm going to be smaller than you."

In the end, Kim directed the same fatphobia back towards her bully. She took "satisfaction" in her bully's larger weight, and although Kim never outwardly bullied this girl, she felt a sense of revenge.

When Christine described her encounter with bullying, she did not differentiate between bully and bystander. She felt that the bystanders had some responsibility for bullying as they neglected to defend her. As Christine said:

One of them said it, and one of them was standing by her. They were two bullies, fully involved 100% ... I saw the two of them as equals. Just because one of them said [it] didn't mean the other one didn't. In that moment they were equally bullying me.

Sharon also commented on the role of bystanders when she recounted being bullied in the change room. Only one peer had tried to help her avoid the humiliation of changing in the centre of the room by trying to unlock a bathroom stall. However, that girl was unsuccessful in her intervention and then did nothing else. Sharon did not hold contempt for that girl because, as a teenager, she understood: "That's all you can do, if you get lumped in with the fat person, your chances are you're going to get made fun of too—just for being their friend." Likewise, most participants did not hold all bystanders accountable, but they were still baffled as to how their peers could tolerate the torment of others.

Other participants discussed what happened when they told their friends at the time that they were being bullied. Kim's friends were more surprised by who was doing

the bullying than the reason for the bullying. Kim's peers did not confront her bully, but her best friend approached her teacher instead after Kim had endured six months of bullying. Kim was grateful for her friend's intervention, but the teacher was not as supportive and did nothing.

Sharon had friends who were similar in size and they empathized with her feelings, but they did not intervene on her behalf either. This was not unusual as most of the participants reported that their friends did not confront the bully or bullies. They did not blame their friends for three reasons: first, their friends were not confrontational in nature; second, their friends were also being bullied and felt helpless already; and third, their friends were not themselves being bullied at the time and did not want to start being targeted themselves. As youth, the participants understood this reasoning, but as adults, they reflected on the nature of their teenage friendships.

Teachers. With youth only being able to do so much, participants discussed the role of teachers who they saw to be in a position of authority and thus able to confront the issue of fat bullying. Many of the previously shared stories reflected how people in a teaching or coaching position reinforced fatphobic ideologies either with how they chose to teach curriculum or how they neglected the fat bullying happening under their supervision. Most participants described these teachers as "useless" and "lazy." Many felt that if their teachers had intervened sooner, they could have prevented some of the damage. Others reflected how some teachers that did try to intervene did so inappropriately.

After Kim's friend reported bullying to Kim's teacher, the teacher called home to notify Kim's mother. The phone call was simply a notification and Kim was adamant that

“[teachers] pretty much took an audience point of view, they didn’t really do anything. I felt like they just wanted it to resolve itself, like she would just stop eventually ... Action didn’t occur until my mom got involved.” Kim explained that it was her mother who arranged conferences with the teacher and the bully’s mom to discuss what was happening, and it was Kim’s mother who worked on coping strategies for Kim. The bullying did not stop and Kim felt helpless: “I hated being the tattletale... I still didn’t want to tell the teacher [what] was happening, I was just hoping that one day she would see it, and say something.” That day never came for Kim.

Sharon revealed that she had difficulties reporting incidents to her teachers because “it actually hurt to repeat what was said to me. It was like being bullied all over again.” Despite Sharon’s reluctance to relive the experience, she finally had the courage to report her bullying to a teacher after being humiliated in the change room. Although Sharon told the teacher about the names the students were calling her, the teacher did not address that and instead informed the class that they were not allowed to touch other people’s belongings. The teacher was not wrong by saying this, but she completely neglected to address the real issue. From then on, Sharon said she stopped trying in that class. She wore track pants to hide her body and lost marks for not wearing proper attire as, apparently, the teacher did not make the connection. Sharon added that the only reprieve came with male teachers who did not allow bullying nor picking teams in ways that marginalized students. Her female teachers did nothing.

Alexa also went to a teacher for help after an incident of fat bullying and, in this case, the result was more positive: “He made me feel much better that (a) for going to speak to him about it, because sometimes that can be difficult, and (b) I felt like he would

at the very least say something [to the bully].” He did indeed approach the bully and Alexa was grateful to him for saying something. Alas, it only stopped the bullying within that class as the bully continued to tease Alexa in other environments, and the talk the teacher had with him seemed to cause even more tension so she just tried to avoid the bully even more. Alexa now suspects that “had we been brought together, we actually could’ve resolved something.”

Despite so many examples of teacher inaction or what appears like wilful ignorance or ineffective interventions, half of the participants did not place much responsibility on the teachers. Some participants recognized how teaching was a complex and time-consuming career. Christine noted that “[teachers] don’t respond, because they don’t have the time to respond. And I almost don’t even blame them, because if you addressed every little thing, how do the kids learn to work things out themselves?” Similarly, Rachel asked, “Are teachers so busy? Probably.” Cece also dismissed teacher responsibility saying, “the teacher can only do so much.”

Sharon was the only participant who actually confronted a teacher. This was after being disciplined for her retaliation against bullies during a field hockey game. Sharon was upset that the other students had not been reprimanded yet she had been, and Sharon yelled at her teacher about it. The teacher’s only response was to send Sharon to the office. The victim was sent to the office instead of the bullies.

Administrative staff. Very few stories concerned administrative staff. Many participants felt strongly that a principal’s intervention might have made incidents more pressing given her or his power. However, the stories about principals that they shared demonstrated a power used unwisely.

For example, when Sharon was sent to the office, she explained her side of the story to her principal. The principal then explained that he could not do anything unless he witnessed the incident or the teacher reported it to him. Although Sharon defended herself by saying that she has tried to get her teacher to do something, the principal responded, “Well, [the teacher] says you have a bad attitude in her class.” Even then, Sharon knew her “bad attitude” was the result of nothing being done to stop the bullying. The principal did not investigate the incident further and clearly did not find Sharon’s concerns warranted his attention. As a result of neither the teacher nor the principal helping, Sharon stopped putting effort into her gym class and observed how her gym teacher “often confused my not wanting to participate in things as ‘I’m lazy because of my size’ as opposed to ‘I don’t want to participate in things because people are picking on me whenever I do.’ That was rough.”

Rachel also had an experience with an indifferent principal. She remembered taking a leave of absence in grade 11 and her principal allowed it without investigating her reasons: “No one ever engaged me.” Christine was adamant that she would never go to a principal for help:

The ones that get into the principal’s office are the ones who get physical, not the mental, right? Those are the ones who get into the office first, they’re more obvious, there are more consequences for that... it’s just you knew what would progress, what wouldn’t and my mind wouldn’t even go there because you can see growing up in the system, what kind of things would, you know, a principal give their time to.

Christine did not believe a principal would feel any sense of urgency in addressing emotional bullying. Cece’s earliest memory with the principal simply involved “the principal calling [the bully] into her office and that was that. Not much was solved.”

Cece was the only participant who mentioned secretarial staff as involved in her experiences of being bullied. She was sent to the office as a victim of bullying and “they were, like, ‘We knew this was coming’... I guess maybe that they thought they didn’t have enough power to help out when they could have.” In fact, Cece proposed that “secretaries can help a lot with filtering through little things... Or the secretaries can work with the teacher, and the principal can deal with larger issues, I guess. I just feel like principals never want to be bothered.”

Blaming oneself. As noted above, participants began to feel that peers, teachers, and staff could not help them and described their growing feelings of helplessness. Without me directly asking them about internalization, the participants described how they often came to believe what bullies had told them.

Christine went home and often stared in the mirror to try to see what others were seeing and admitted she “probably agreed... yeah, I did.” Indeed, she added that she became obsessed with staring in the mirror for awhile. This, she felt, explained why she never resorted to reporting her bullying to staff:

I know that’s probably why I didn’t bring it up to a teacher because you can’t whine all of the time. And that’s what that would’ve been looked at as, that would be like that’s whining... So there was no one to talk to so you just internalized it and worked with it. You worked it out in your own way.

Other participants similarly described how they felt that they just had to work through it themselves in their childhood and youth.

Rachel also talked about how she came to believe what her bullies were saying: “I internalized a lot and I felt very lonely. I felt... [long pause] I hated school. I hated it. I hated it for so many reasons that drew from [bullying] because I just didn’t feel like I fit

at all.” I probed with Rachel why she internalized so much: “I think initially it was just being bullied and feeling like a total loser, and just not feeling accepted. And then it grew into something deeper, and then I started to believe them.”

Perhaps where this internationalization was most obvious is in the participants’ efforts to lose weight. Sharon, for example, started to simply accept what was happening to her:

I started to think that I deserved being treated like that because my body was not compliant with the typical grade 9, what you think of as how a grade 9 should look, how a healthy grade 9 should look. So I definitely internalized it. I definitely thought [if] I could just lose some weight people will stop making fun of me. It became this really awful, torturous cycle of trying to lose weight.

As a high school student, Sharon thought, “You should make it so that you can’t be made fun of, and the way to do it is to lose weight.”

Wanting to lose weight so that the bullying would stop was a common theme amongst the participants. Alexa admitted that the stress led her to bingeing and purging in order to prevent any weight gain. All participants also tried various diets in the hope of losing weight to attain a socially constructed version of an attractive body.

As children, participants assigned responsibility to bullies, peers, teachers, and administrative staff. Eventually they internalized the fatphobia and chose to blame themselves and feel that they were personally responsible for their bodies not fitting what they perceived to be normal. Now, as adults hoping to enter a teaching career, they have come full circle and again assign some responsibility for bullying to teachers and administrative staff.

Parents. Looking back, many of the participants assigned some responsibility for their weight and health (since most saw these as intimately related) to their parents as

well. Two participants, Rachel and Alexa, explained that their parents had reinforced their bad eating habits as well as teased them about their weight. Both felt their parents were well intentioned, but that in the end, their actions were harmful. Alexa wished that her “parents had been a little more diligent with helping [her] to lose the weight.”

Mothers in particular were the focus of discussion as they were seen as the primary caregivers for these participants. Cece and Alexa both described their mothers for being responsible for their food intake while at school. Ultimately though, none of the participants fully blamed their parents for their weight or the resultant bullying they endured.

However, when asked what they think now, as teacher candidates, when they see “overweight” students, all participants assigned complete responsibility for the child’s weight to the parents. The deep conviction with which they held this was very clear in the multiple statements they made about it. For example, many directly said, “It’s the parents’ responsibility.” Kim, reflecting on her own experiences, cried while talking about the role of parents when saying, “You’re asking your kid to be a victim.”

Many participants identified pivotal stressful and emotional times related to their weight both for themselves and their parents, and concluded that their parents were not at fault. Yet, when seeing other overweight youth today, Christine said, “I get mad at their parents, oh, I get really mad. I get very judgemental.” Sharon shared how, working at a restaurant, she observes parents ordering their children an adult-sized order: “I can’t help but think that they’re being negligent in teaching their kids about nutrition.” Sharon, knowledgeable of the “Health at Every Size” movement, went on to say that she did not

think these “overweight” children and youth were necessarily unhealthy, but did say, “that kid’s probably getting bullied.”

Alexa felt that the student’s age had to be taken into account when determining the responsibility of parents for their child’s weight; she felt that when students are children it is the responsibility of the parents and when they are adults it is their personal responsibility. Other participants, Rachel and Sharon, talked about an “information gap” between generations of parents and asserted that their own parents were not well educated about nutrition and health in general which helped absolve them of blame. The same participants did not excuse contemporary parents who they now blame for the current crop of “overweight” children. A couple of participants, Christine and Kim, felt so strongly about this that they described how it would be difficult for them to refrain from pulling parents aside to discuss the “health” of their child even if it might be overstepping their position as teachers.

Theme Five: Their Future Students

Given the blame the participants assigned to their own teachers for not intervening when they were bullied as students, it was important to investigate how these teacher candidates planned to prevent such bullying from happening to their own future students.

Addressing fat bullying. All participants were explicitly asked, “How might you as a teacher respond if you witnessed an incident of fat bullying?” All participants spoke about addressing the matter immediately, but suggested different tactics. Rachel and Cece said that if they witnessed bullying during class, they would stop the class and discuss the bullying right at that moment. Rachel went on to say that she would shift curriculum as

needed so that she could spend a week addressing bullying in general. She also said that she would pull aside both the bullied and the bully to ensure that she connected with them and acknowledged their feelings. Cece also mentioned having individual conversations with the bully and victim following a class discussion. She repeated a familiar message: “I have a zero tolerance for bullying in my classroom and this school has a zero tolerance.” She did not expand on what that actually meant for her and she also did not mention involving the principal or the consequences she felt there should be given “zero tolerance.” Cece also said that she would want to discuss the long-term effects of bullying, such as the victim being body conscious and the bully being self-destructive, but was uncertain about what age would be appropriate for such conversations.

Sharon appeared particularly confident when answering this question, perhaps due to her longer experience and her knowledge about fat oppression. Unlike Rachel and Cece, she did not suggest having a class discussion, but rather focused on pulling the bully aside to clearly say, “This is not acceptable behaviour. This is why it’s not acceptable behaviour. This will be the consequence if you do it again.” Sharon did not expand on what precisely the consequences might be as she was not certain what those could be. Sharon went on to describe how she would confront the bully by saying:

It’s not acceptable. I don’t think you should even think about the person like this, but if you’re going to think that people should lose weight then you need to keep it to yourself, or you need to go about it in a more encouraging way. So next time, when you’re playing basketball, pick that person for your team on purpose.

Although Sharon was an advocate for celebrating Health at Every Size, nonetheless, she still suggested that the bully could positively encourage the victim to lose weight.

Other participants, namely Christine and Kim, also suggested that pulling the bully aside privately to make clear that bullying was harmful and not acceptable behaviour was a good strategy to use as a teacher. Kim also discussed having separate conferences with the bully and the victim to hear both sides of the story. Doing so would help her understand the bully's actions and make clear to him or her that there would be consequences if it continued and that they would need to develop strategies together. Kim also could not elaborate on what the consequences might be. She did suggest additional strategies could include involving the principal and sending a note home to the bully's parent(s). I asked Kim if she would address the specifics around fat bullying and in contrast to Sharon, she said:

I don't think I would, because I don't want to make it seem like it's not okay to be fat, because it is, obviously it's not healthy and yeah, they should lose weight obviously, but I don't want the bully to think, 'Oh well, she thinks you're fat too.' [So] I don't think I'd address it.

Sharon and Kim discussed what they would say to the victim after witnessing an incident of fat bullying. Sharon and Kim both said they would tell the victim that they were handling the situation and that the victim should approach them if it happened again. Both had been very disappointed that their teachers never followed up with them and had stopped going to their teachers for help, yet both still suggested giving the responsibility of following up to their victimized students rather than being proactive themselves.

Christine said she would focus more on the bully and that she too would avoid addressing weight per se. Indeed, she differed from the previous participants given she talked only about addressing the bully and not the victim. Christine wanted to use a pre-scripted story that sent the message that a bully will ultimately end up unhappy if he or

she continues to bully others. Christine had some sympathy for the bully because she asserted that “people that are bullies have usually been bullied.” As a teacher, she feels it will be her responsibility to help the bully because “the bully’s the problem, because the bully got bullied. I don’t think anyone’s born this way; no one is born a bully. It was learned.” Christine recognized that there are underlying reasons for bullies to behave in the ways they do, so she wanted to concentrate her efforts there.

Alexa also did not address the specifics of weight in addressing fat bullying, but she was alone in suggesting a more collaborative way to handle bullying. She said that she plans to bring the two students together to talk about their feelings, the reasons for bullying, and how to act in future. Alexa reasoned that this strategy might be more beneficial because she found separate conversations, in her experience, resulted in bullying stopping around that specific teacher but continuing in other environments because the two students did not know how to interact with each other more positively.

Ultimately, many of the participants seemed unsure what the “right” answer was or what they were even allowed to do as teachers. Indeed, most appeared to be basing their suggestions on their own experiences of bullying and what might have helped them. The inconsistency in strategies for addressing bullying and their lack of confidence in addressing bullying may have something to do with their lack of preparation for that in their BEd program. Four of the participants explicitly said that they felt unprepared to appropriately address bullying in general, let alone fat bullying specifically.

Learning in the BEd program. As discussed earlier, the four participants who were enrolled in the “Health and Physical Education” course during the term I interviewed them revealed that the instructor focused on mainstream ideas about the

“obesity epidemic.” The typical stereotypes about fat youth being less active and glued to the television were perpetuated and there was no discussion of Health at Every Size or how to include all body shapes and sizes and abilities in the course. They were instead exhorted to “fix” the growing “problem” of the “obesity epidemic” with more active lessons. There was no discussion of fat bullying.

I asked all the participants, “How, if at all, have your courses approached bullying?” Kim and Sharon were both adamant that thus far in the program, none of their courses had addressed bullying. This might reflect how early in the term we talked or that they were not taking certain courses this term, given Rachel and Alexa were both enrolled in an “Education Law” class that mentioned the importance of being aware of bullying. Alexa mentioned a peer group presentation in that class where her peers stated that a teacher’s “duty of care” included not singling out students who bully but to report the incident to the principal. Given the professor did not challenge this assertion, Alexa considered it affirmed, but she remained doubtful that was indeed a law.

Christine felt it was too early in the term to accurately answer my question. After following up with her through email at the end of the term, Christine responded that she now knew that:

If I see it, it is my responsibility to report it to the principal. It falls under Common Law (Negligence & Duty of Care to the Student). I have the responsibility to protect students from harm that is reasonably foreseeable. In other words, don’t turn a blind eye.

Rachel was enrolled in the same course but with a different professor, and she had just finished reading an article about bullying. In their class discussions, teacher candidates were warned to be aware of the signs of bullying and to address it. Rachel thus noted that she was told to address the bullying, but was not taught *how* to do so. She felt

that awareness was not enough and that anti-bullying education needed to go deeper. She suggested that pre-service teachers should be required to take anti-bullying courses.

Cece also requested further training and mentioned a desire for an in-depth examination of bullying through information sessions, as there did not appear to be a specified location for it in the BEd curriculum. She said:

Obviously, as adults we know some ways to address bullying: go to the problem, see where it stems, and is it in the school system or any system to try to get to the problem and solve it from there, whether in a group or individually.

Three participants described being taught a specific strategy for dealing with bullying. Alexa, Christine, and Cece were enrolled in an “Exceptional Students” course and were taught about the importance of inclusivity. They were given ideas for how to incorporate inclusion, acceptance, and tolerance into their lessons. All three felt that this would help prevent bullying, but noted that the discussion was centred on students with learning disabilities.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Following the same format as the previous chapter, the discussion of findings is organized into five themes: concepts of health; physical education and activity in school environments; other school environments; assigning responsibility; and their future students. This chapter discusses the study's results more analytically and makes connections to previous research mentioned in the literature review in the second chapter. I conclude with recommendations for pre-service teacher education that are grounded in analysis of the experiences of the participants.

Concepts of Health

Wann (2009) and Burgard (2009), among many others, have illustrated how it is problematic to use weight as an isolated measure of health. These participants, all of whom had lived experience in bodies that society had deemed fat at some point or another and who appeared to me (as an outsider) to have fulfilling lives that would be in line with more holistic understandings of health, had difficulty separating weight from health. Further, it was striking how all of them were inconsistent at some point in their interview when discussing their conceptions of health, demonstrating just how much each of them had internalized dominant obesity discourse.

Explicit definitions and contradictions in conceptions of health. Most of the participants defined health broadly enough to include physical and mental health. In her review of research on fatness and health, Wann (2009) concluded that it is very problematic to view health as anything but complex. She warns that endorsing a simplistic understanding that focuses only on physical health, and a narrow version of that to boot, continues to foster the belief that fat people are inherently unhealthy and that

an easy “cure” for fatness exists. It was no surprise, then, to see how most participants focused on individual responsibility. Even Sharon who was aware of the Health at Every Size movement talked at some point about weight as an indicator of health and discussed individual responsibility.

Initially, I did find it somewhat surprising to see how much fear discourse ran through participants’ descriptions of health. Yet, upon reflection, such fear discourse made sense given the hysteria around obesity that is rampant in the media and is fuelled by the medical and public health communities (Wann, 2009). As Burgard (2009) notes, “fat people are blamed for their health problems” (p. 42). Still, I found it sad to see how many of the participants believed that their weight meant that they themselves were not healthy, even though there were no other indications that they were not in fact so. Indeed, it was very clear that they had internalized the message that fat people are inherently unhealthy and, as such, more prone to certain diseases and an untimely demise; it was clear that the fear of fat had been felt deeply by all participants, leading all of them to engage in weight loss behaviours at some point in their lives, with most of them remaining determined to lose weight or at least not gain any additional weight.

Even as an avid reader of, and writing on, fat oppression that offers a critical reading of health research and as an advocate that one can indeed be healthy at any size, I too have my own inner struggles with “really” believing fat is okay. I thus recognize how hard it is to stay confident and consistent when talking about weight and health. I do not think participants meant to reproduce the same oppressive discourse that they had experienced, but all of us, the participants and myself included, are marinated in a deeply

fatphobic culture so it is no surprise that we have internalized what we have been told not only by our tormenters but society in general (Russell et al., 2013).

As noted above, each of the participants at some point reproduced the same fatphobic discourse in their interview that had caused them to self-monitor and try to lose weight, instead of simply accepting their bodies. All the participants had engaged in weight loss tactics in pursuit of “health” which appeared to result from equating health with thinness. Pascal and Kurpius (2012) observe that “obese individuals who experience weight stigmatization or who internalized society’s negative attitudes about weight are more likely to suffer from psychological distress, binge eating, and body image disturbance” (p. 349). Certainly, all of the participants in this story had internalized the fatphobia directed at them whether explicitly through bullying or implicitly through what they were taught in school, by parents, and in society generally. Some coped with the pain of being targeted through binge eating and purging or fell ill when stressed by the bullying.

Furthermore, Cameron et al. (2014) argue our bodies are more than “just physical entities but also psycho-emotional entities” (p. 696). Certainly treatment of eating disorders, in general, attends to both physical and mental health. Burgard (2009) reminds us that it is “hypocritical to prescribe practices for heavier people that we would diagnose as eating disordered in thin ones” (p. 42). As noted in the literature review, fat people who engage in weight loss strategies may not *look* like they have an eating disorder given we often associate eating disorders only with anorexic bodies, but they are equally susceptible to physically harmful behaviours like starving themselves, bingeing, or purging as well as the underlying mental illnesses associated with other eating disorders

like bulimia and anorexia. Even if fat people do not develop eating disorders, they still must live with the psychological distress of stigma (Pascal & Kurpius, 2012).

Obesity epidemic and health promotion. Due to the age of the participants, none mentioned obesity epidemic discourse as being part of their childhood, but all now were well aware of the concept given its prevalence. For those who had taken a “Health and Physical Education” course in their BEd program, the idea of an obesity epidemic was further reinforced. Indeed, those participants enrolled in the course spoke about it with a sense of great urgency as they discussed their future role as teachers. This echoes Cameron et al.’s (2014) assertion that schooling in general, and health and physical educators in particular, bear much responsibility for heightening concerns about the obesity epidemic and encouraging fat oppression.

Cameron et al. (2014) also observe how “physical inactivity continues to be positioned as a primary determinant of obesity” (p. 691) even though a lack of activity is a simplistic understanding of the complex phenomenon of body weight. Like Wann’s (2009) disdain for there being an easy “cure” for obesity, Cameron et al. (2014) assert that the mainstream “solution” to the obesity “problem” of simply increasing activity and eating well fails to recognize other factors that contribute to weight and health (which I separate here very purposely given the causal link between the two is so tenuous). Certainly, participants reproduced that idea when discussing the need to increase the physical activity of their future students and felt justified in doing so when they compared the “sedentary” lifestyle of children today to their memories of their own activity-filled childhoods. What I find particularly fascinating here is the contradictions between this reasoning and their own lived experience; if participants did have higher activity levels

than today's alleged sedentary children, how do they explain their own childhood weight if they really believe that activity is the determining factor?

As outlined in the literature review, other determinants of health need to be considered, including access to health care, access to healthy food, impacts of fat oppression on mental health, genetics, gender, race, and class (Cameron et al., 2014; Robertson & Thomson, 2012). Although some participants did acknowledge the role of race and class when they discussed contemporary fat youth, they then neglected these factors when discussing the need of their future students to maintain a “healthy” weight. As noted in previous sections, this should not be surprising given we live in a culture that privileges thinness and where fat people find themselves the poster children for an “epidemic” and held accountable as individuals for it (Schafer & Ferraro, 2011). No wonder then that people, the participants included, want to “save” fat children and youth (Campos, Saguy, Ernsberger, Oliver & Gaesser, 2005; Evans, Davies & Rich, 2008).

While their own experiences with fat bullying enabled the participants to be empathetic towards and thus extremely protective of fat youth, they still felt that their own future students should maintain a “healthy” weight. Indeed, many participants indicated that they would offer to help their students set and achieve weight loss goals as part of their work as teachers promoting health in schools. Only one of the participants was aware of the Health at Every Size approach and even she did not mention it as something she would incorporate into her work with future students. Yet Health At Every Size has great potential for educators as it offers a new, holistic, and more complex way to look at health that focuses on encouraging healthy behaviours where weight loss *might* happen, but is not the intention. In fact, HAES opposes any goal setting in terms of

weight as it finds purposeful weight loss tactics to be unhealthy and often unsuccessful over the long term for any size of person (Burgard, 2009; Wann, 2009).

Significantly, participants' plans for health promotion were focused on work inside the classroom, whereas the much of their own experience with bullies occurred during recess periods, in gymnasiums, change rooms, and outdoor fields. What might health promotion look like if it were practiced in all these environments and took a Health At Every Size approach?

Physical Education and Activity in School Environments

All participants admitted to engaging in weight loss endeavours to not only escape bullying but also to feel as though they belonged in school, demonstrating how they felt that their social inclusion was reliant on their body shape. This perception, alas, is very much true according to research. As noted in the literature review, being fat can lead to both social exclusion and bullying in elementary and secondary school (Gesser-Edelsburg & Endevelt, 2011; Taylor, 2011; Weinstock & Krehbiel, 2009; Wykes & Gunter, 2004). Peterson et al.'s (2012) research found that "weight-related bullying appears to be heavily concentrated in school settings including the classroom, cafeteria, playground, locker-room, and hallways" (p. 177). Certainly, the participants in my study provided further evidence of this as they described bullying experiences in every one of these school environments.

Gymnasium and outdoor field. Fat bullying certainly occurred in the gymnasium. Participants reported not just verbal bullying, but also social exclusion and assumptions about what they were or were not capable of based on their size. As Cameron et al. (2014) indicate, "many students remember their physical education

experiences as negative and derived from frameworks predicated upon competition and the shaming of ‘unfit’ bodies” (p. 697). Participants learned to compare their bodies and their abilities to other students and certainly could see how privilege was afforded to “fit” and thin bodies in these environments.

Participants also described the feeling of being constantly watched and prone to criticism, which deterred their enthusiasm to be active both in and outside of the Physical Education environment. This feeling of surveillance undoubtedly was a factor in internalizing fat oppression and fits well with Cameron et al.’s (2014) Foucauldian analysis of how “healthy” bodies are “schooled” and how we all learn to monitor each other and ourselves for how well we fit the thin norm. As discussed above, this internalization of fat oppression can have profound impacts on health (Pascal & Kurpius, 2012). How ironic that teachers and administrators who wish to increase physical activity in the name of “saving” fat youth from their unhealthy lifestyles actually foster such destructive environments that likely cause more harm in the end to fat students’ health.

Sports teams. The privileging of “fit” students, particularly athletic students, was not reserved to the gymnasium. Brady’s (2004) research confirmed what most participants already knew very well; “athletes, or jocks as they are more commonly known, stood at the apex of the hierarchy” (p. 359). Participants described feeling discriminated against as they witnessed teachers and administrators favour athletes both in school generally and on teams in particular. Participants’ recollections of being cut from teams and spending more time on the bench versus the court echoes the finding of Peterson et al. (2012) who found that teachers often discourage fat youth participation.

Sadly, those participants who were members of sports teams simply accepted the unfair treatment at the time because they considered being a team member to be a great privilege. Participants were taught to sacrifice their own feelings of self-worth for the status of being on a sports team. As in the gymnasium and on the field, once again, activities that presumably are meant to motivate students instead harmed them.

The girls' change room. Another highly charged school environment for participants was the change room. As noted in the literature review, many women have high body dissatisfaction and thus are very self-conscious. For example, Harper and Tiggemann (2008) noted how women judge themselves as well as other women very harshly after viewing media images of thin women. Change rooms can provide a “real life” opportunity to compare and contrast bodies. The participants compared themselves to thinner peers very unfavourably and were frustrated with their own bodies. They thus felt compelled to change elsewhere, to hide in corners of the room, or to change their clothes while remaining as covered as they could.

Sheldon (2010) notes that “comparison with thin attractive models ... [leads] to lowering of body esteem as long as participants considered models to be similar with them” (p. 279). In the change rooms, participants compared themselves to peers of the same age who they perceived as not only thin and popular but as model students in their schools; these comparisons were a source of great frustration and shame and led one participant to take Physical Education in the summer term and other participants from engaging in any public physical activity at all.

Greenleaf et al. (2006) concluded that fat youth did not engage in physical activity due to their belief that they would be unable to perform tasks successfully because of

their weight, but my findings revealed something quite different. Participants were discouraged more by being bullied for their weight or by being perceived as lacking in athleticism. The discouragement, then, was coming not just from peers but also from physical education teachers. As others have noted, these teachers have much to answer for in the oppression of fat youth (Cameron et al., 2014; Russell et al., 2013; Sykes & McPhail, 2011).

Other School Environments

Participants described stories of being fat bullied in school at both the elementary and secondary levels. The earliest memory of bullying described by a participant in my study was grade three. Fatphobia, alas, seems to blossom early in girls' lives given that, as Dohnt and Tiggemann (2005) described, there is a correlation between when girls enter school and when they start to become more body conscious. Once they enter school, students appear to learn that there is something wrong with appearing different from the thin ideal and some subsequently learn that it is tolerable to harass others based on that difference.

Classrooms. Despite teacher presence, classrooms provided little safety for participants as there were few interventions from adult staff to stop the bullying. Participants shared stories of being bullied physically (pinching, poking) as well as verbally through fatphobic and dehumanizing taunts. One participant's experience of being compared to an earthquake immediately reminded me of Freire's (1970) explanation of oppression as coming from a failure to recognize another as human. Even when participants were called the more common "fatso" or "fatty," they were being dehumanized through being reduced to a soluble.

Some participants also brought attention to the physical landscape of the classroom, echoing the work of Hetrick and Attig (2009) who argued that classroom spaces and furniture can be confining and contribute to the oppression of fat students. Although participants did not themselves state that their own childhood or teenage classrooms were problematic, one participant talked about how she would set up her own classroom to be more accessible for herself as the teacher. Certainly, this is something that would be useful to pursue as all students, not just fat students and fat teachers, would benefit from a more physically accessible environment (Hetrick & Attig, 2009).

Recess. Participants were also bullied outside of class environments and even though recess is, theoretically at least, supervised by teachers, participants described incidents of fat bullying that happened then, including transitional times going to and returning from recess. Breaks to eat food were also unsafe for participants as food intake and body type were often commented on, regardless of what students were actually eating or not eating. Schools, like other spaces in our society, are embedded in and reinforce dieting cultures (Dohnt & Tiggemann, 2005) so it is no surprise that fatphobia would be present in the cafeteria. As with the gymnasium, some participants talked about their discomfort in a cafeteria setting and their feelings of being watched, echoing Cameron et al.'s (2014) concerns about surveillance. In response, they call for teachers to critically engage “how the bodies of youth are turned into political sites of privilege and oppression through evaluation, monitoring, and surveying of bodies” (p. 690). Further, the ways in which participants learned to self-monitor their food intake in a public setting like a cafeteria, for example, points to the way they internalized fat oppression.

Clothing brands. Bacon (2009) noted that one privilege awarded to thin people is greater retail choices and this was echoed in the stories of my participants. Some talked about being excluded from certain social groups or feeling very alone because they were not wearing a certain brand of clothing. The data did not suggest that money was an issue; rather both brands mentioned, although expensive, were affordable for these participants but did not come in their sizes. The inability to wear certain brands due to size prevented participants from conforming to their peers, something they very much wanted to do at the time. This is consistent with Brady (2004)'s research that identified clothing as an important part of socializing students to cultural norms.

Desirability. Bacon (2009) asserted that there is a larger dating pool for thin women as they fit the dominant norm of what is socially coded as attractive. Schools, like society in general, reflect these norms and students learn who is considered attractive and who is not. While Brady (2004) does not explicitly mention body size, he asserts one's "appearance played a role in the marginalization of a number of groups" (p. 361). Participants' retrospective accounts, as well as their current feelings, solidified how appearance made them feel alienated as they equated thinness with beauty and thus perceiving themselves as ugly, undesirable, and unattractive because they were fat.

The findings clearly point to how participants worried about their attractiveness and often felt excluded for not being conventionally attractive, whether as a dance partner or as a date. Sheldon (2010) asserts that this is particularly an issue for girls and women given we are often taught that "women attract men through their physical appearance" (p. 278). This became poignantly clear in this study when some participants described their feeling a sense of achievement when they had a boyfriend, even when he was less than

ideal and sometimes even harmful as a partner. We continue to live in a culture that continues to define women's worth and value by the man who chooses to stand beside her.

Assigning Responsibility

Some have argued that fat shaming could be a useful strategy to motivate people to change their lifestyle (Callahan, 2013). Weinstock and Krehbiel (2009) note that some have made similar arguments about bullying of fat youth. My findings did indeed demonstrate that these victims of fat bullying felt compelled to lose weight because of the bullying. Whether that is remotely ethical or effective, however, is another matter. Perhaps some may choose to believe that fat bullying was helpful in the end by pressuring these women to lose weight, but it is important to also note how each participant endured much emotional and physical stress. None of the participants came out of these experiences unscathed.

Participants found a number of people accountable for the fat bullying they endured, but none blamed the systemic forces at play. Those who did the bullying were clearly held accountable and so too were peers who did not intervene. Similarly, teachers and administrative staff were found accountable for not intervening immediately or for not doing so effectively enough to prevent further occurrences. With little help from others, participants seemed to internalize fat oppression and blame themselves for the weight that prompted the bullying. Interestingly and perhaps surprisingly, while participants had compassion for their own parents, they unanimously attacked parents of contemporary fat youth who "let" their children become "overweight." In essence, then,

participants appeared to have two things for which they wanted to assign blame – one for the bullying itself and one for the weight that was perceived to lead to the bullying.

Bullies and other peers. Participants felt that peers were most responsible for their victimization but also felt some disappointment in not being helped by their peers. Puhl et al.'s (2011) study of weight-based teasing illustrated that peers were unlikely to intervene when it came to incidents of fat bullying, which certainly resonates with my own findings. Participants suspected that their peers did not know how to intervene effectively and also understood that they, too, might have been afraid of then being bullied themselves, which points to the need for all students to be taught about bullying, including ways to intervene. Further, this is something that teachers could model. Students are certainly paying attention to their teachers' actions; as Peterson et al. (2012) observed, "when teachers do not intervene in bullying situations, their students are also less likely to intervene" (p. 178).

Teachers. Participants shared multiple examples of teachers neglecting to address, or ineffectively addressing, fat bullying and how that allowed the bullying to persist. Further, when teachers punished one of the participants for physically confronting her bullies but not the bullies for their original behaviour that prompted the retaliation, the lesson that fat bullying is acceptable and responding to it is not is learned pretty quickly. Even when teachers try to address bullying in general but neglect to address the fatphobia underlying it, students likely hear the generic anti-bullying messages that do not get to the systemic roots of the problem (Walton, 2005). Further, when teachers uncritically teach curriculum content that privileges the thin ideal or use activities like

fitness tests that mandate students compare themselves to one another, they reproduce fatphobia.

Brady (2004) argued that social groups and social attitudes were first “constructed by students and reinforced by administrators and teaching staff” (p. 356) whereas in a number of stories my participants shared, it is evident that teachers were the ones who had set the example for students. To use one example from the data, peers picking teams with fat students always being picked last and teachers supporting that method reinforced that this was an appropriate practice. This clearly echoes Sykes and McPhail’s (2011) finding that the way teachers conduct their Physical Education classes can reproduce or disrupt negative stereotypes of fat students, which is very clear to all students. Another example mentioned above is the court time given to participants. For those who played team sports, they and their peers learned they were “lucky” to be part of the team even if all that meant is that they sat on the bench most of the time. Physical education teachers and coaches reinforcing fatphobia have been noted in other studies too (Peterson et al., 2012; Yager & O’Dea, 2005).

I must say that I was struck by one of the participant’s experience that her male physical education teachers were more helpful than her female teachers. This stands in contrast to Peterson et al. (2012) who felt that female teachers’ empathy might make them more responsiveness than male teachers to the impacts of weight stigma on students.

Administrative staff. Changing and enforcing teaching practices, and the culture of schools certainly is within the mandate of administrators. In the case of the participant who was disciplined for retaliating against her bullies, her principal ignored the fat

bullying she was experiencing and focused instead on her confrontational behaviour. Walton (2010) remains critical of policies and those who enforce policies that promote “regulation of student behaviour [because it] appears to provide order in schools, a key factor that relieves the pressure placed upon educational administrators to ‘do something’” (p. 147). In this instance, the principal was able to appear as though he addressed the issue of physical violence in the class because he addressed the participant’s behaviour, but the systemic forces that fostered the fat bullying were not addressed and thus school continued to be an oppressive environment.

Participants shared very few stories about their experiences with principals, but the ones who did, felt unsupported. One participant felt that her pain was invisible; another felt that her experience of bullying was unimportant, and another felt that she was a nuisance with her repetitive visits to the office. Further, the way participants described their administrator’s very few interventions demonstrated how an emphasis was placed on individual students and their behaviour. Walton (2011) thinks this focus is problematic as “children may feel confused about our insistence that their behaviour must change, given that we adults model such behaviours in schools, at home, and in the entertainment media” (p. 135). Indeed, adult staff in these participants’ schools set an example of tolerance for fat bullying when they either refused to investigate specific instances when reported or remained unresponsive even when participants were adamant that the principals were aware of what was going on. The administrators described in these interviews appeared to be complicit in the fat bullying.

Blaming oneself. Research has shown that women’s body image is most defined by peer response (e.g. Sheldon, 2010) so it is not surprising that fat bullying led to

participants focusing so much on their own bodies. Mackey and La Greca (2008) stipulated “that girls’ own attitudes and their perceptions of peers’ weight and appearance norms are pathways through which peer crowd identification may influence weight control behaviors” (p. 1099). Echoing the disturbing idea that fat shaming or bullying can motivate people to lose weight (Dohnt & Tiggemann, 2005; Li & Rukavina, 2012; Mackey & La Greca, 2008), the bullying seemed to reinforce participants’ view that the body is a trainable machine (Cameron et al., 2014). Their own lived experiences should have helped them challenge that idea given they were unable to lose weight easily, but instead they often felt like failures.

Fat bullying thus led to participants internalizing fatphobia, which as noted above, led them sometimes to engage in dangerous weight loss behaviours like disordered eating, and disengage from physical activity. They absorbed the blame that society places on the fat individual who clearly lacks self-discipline (Cameron et al., 2014; Weinstock & Krehbiel, 2009). Other studies on fat bullying also noted how internalized fatphobia could lead to low self-esteem, eating disorders, and becoming an overt bully themselves (Griffiths et al., 2005; Wojtowicz & von Ranson, 2011).

Sheldon (2010) asserted that “most social behaviors are learned by watching others’ behaviors and behavioral consequences and using these observations to direct future behavior” (p. 280). Participants in my study learned that bullying for weight was acceptable and some then themselves engaged in questionable retaliation. One participant found competitive pleasure in her bully gaining weight while she became more thin, another focused on all the negative qualities of her bully to reassure herself, one had begun to retaliate against others physically, and another had begun to bully other girls for

their thinness out of jealousy. Participants were later ashamed of their actions. Being bullied sometimes led to a vicious circle of prejudice and oppression.

Parents. While participants were compassionate with their own parents when discussing their weight as children, this compassion was not present when discussing parents of contemporary fat children. Participants talked about how, in their practice as future teachers, they would feel compelled to speak with parents about their children's weight. Interestingly, while participants placed responsibility for the weight of children and youth on parents in general, it was telling that when participants spoke about meals, packed lunches, or anything to do with home practices, mothers were then primarily implicated. This supports Boero's (2009) findings that blame for fatness is placed on "working mothers for allowing their children to watch too much television, for not having their eating habits more closely monitored, and for relying on convenience foods for meals" (p. 115). As she indicates, this focus on "evaluating the fitness of mothers based on the size of their children obscures larger structural issues of racism, economic inequality, fat phobia, and sexism among others" (p. 113).

Their Future Students

I have already addressed some aspects of these participants' future practice as teachers in this chapter, including how they wanted to set up their classroom and how they wanted to help ensure that their students maintained a "healthy" weight through encouraging physical activity and good nutrition, helping students set and achieve weight loss goals, and intervening with parents who they blamed for children's weight. As noted above, focusing on helping their students manage their weight is being done with the best of intentions - to help ensure their students are "healthy" and to help their students avoid

the bullying they themselves experienced. Nonetheless, such an approach is reproducing the very fatphobia that is at the root of the bullying they experienced.

When discussing how they might address fat bullying when they become teachers themselves, participants indicated that they did not yet feel adequately prepared to do so effectively. Their proposed interventions (with either or both the bully and the bullied) tended to reflect what did or did not work in their own experiences, and thus were based on intuitive understandings rather than explicit techniques or approaches. Further, none of their proposed interventions involved peers even though they had discussed how they had felt when their peers either did not intervene or were not able to so do effectively.

While I interviewed them early in their BEd program, the findings suggest that they were as yet unprepared to deal with the bullying in general and they certainly were not prepared to deal with fat bullying specifically. Thus far in the term, bullying in general had only been explicitly addressed for some of them in one class in the “Education Law” course and in a student presentation at that. Only in the “Exceptional Students” class had some participants found bullying to have been addressed in a bit more depth, with methods for ensuring students with learning disabilities were fully included. Most participants felt that their professors recognized how prevalent bullying was in schools and how important it was for them as pre-service teachers to be aware of it. But superficial awareness alone cannot possibly address the problem, especially given that the systemic roots of, and responses to, bullying presumably takes sustained effort and time (Walton, 2005).

Ultimately, given such limited attention to bullying, I wonder if the implicit curriculum is that bullying is still not that big of a concern. Further, the implicit

curriculum may also be that all bullying is similar and that the specific types of bullying are not important since only bullying of students with learning disabilities was explicitly discussed. There was no mention whatsoever of fat bullying; rather the “Health and Physical Education” course where one might expect the topic to be raised at least, reinforced the hysteria surrounding the “obesity epidemic.” This, alas, is not surprising given the hysteria around obesity as a global crisis and how schools are being positioned as a key site to resolve it (Cameron et al., 2014).

With these problems in mind, I turn now to how this study offers a critique of both the current school system and pre-service teacher education, briefly discuss what this study means for critical pedagogy and fat studies, offer three recommendations for pre-service education, and conclude with a personal reflection.

Implications for Critical Pedagogy and Fat Studies

This research calls attention to the intolerance of fat bodies in schools and it highlights the importance of applying ideas from fat studies to critical pedagogy in an effort to tackle fat oppression within school environments. Fat studies analyzes and addresses the oppression of fat bodies while critical pedagogy works to create the conditions whereby all learners can flourish. Together, fat studies and critical pedagogy can come together in what Russell et al. (2013) have dubbed “fat pedagogy.”

Freire (1970) believed that it was the experience of oppression that could bring oppressed people together to foster social change. This is a significant point given that some members of marginalized groups such as people of colour, women, and LGBT people, have empowered themselves and enacted powerful social change. But if members of an oppressed group have internalized oppression in the ways in which many of my

participants have, how are they to respond? I would argue that, thus far, the empowerment felt by those actively engaged in the fat acceptance movement has yet to be embraced by most fat people. Given the experiences of my participants, it would appear at first glance as if they would be in an ideal position to challenge fat oppression within schools. In contrast, findings showed that participants had been so exposed to fatphobic discourse in the media and popular culture, as well as in their elementary and secondary education, and, alas again, in the “Health and Physical Education” course in their BEd, that they had deeply internalized and unintentionally reproduced the fatphobia that had so hurt them when they were children or teenagers.

These participants will not tolerate fat bullying in the same ways their teachers had tolerated it, but they also are unlikely to challenge certain fatphobic discourse, such as discussions of the “obesity epidemic.” Their lack of exposure to critical pedagogy was similar to mine and they simply are unaware of the systemic roots of fat bullying and how fat oppression is reinforced by schools and through certain pedagogical strategies, particularly in health and physical education.

Exposure in the BEd to critical pedagogy in general, and fat pedagogy in particular, would greatly benefit pre-service teachers, and ultimately their future students. It would be invaluable if all pre-service teachers were able to recognize privilege and oppression, to critically engage both the explicit and implicit curriculum, and to understand and respond to the systemic causes of bullying. Doing so might provide a basis for confronting all types of bullying, including fat bullying.

Recommendations

Throughout my thesis, I have argued that at the root of fat bullying is a society that is obsessed with weight, that privileges thin bodies, and penalizes those who do not or who cannot meet the thin ideal. Schools are part and parcel of this society and, as this study has demonstrated, schools reproduce fatphobia in both the explicit and implicit curricula. Challenging dominant obesity discourse is possible, and one place to start is through ensuring we offer more critical teacher education. I thus conclude the thesis with three recommendations for how BEd programs might help pre-service teachers think more critically about obesity discourse and develop skills to address fat bullying in their future practices.

1. Offer a specific course, or part of a course, that tackles oppression and bullying from a systemic perspective. As noted at the outset of this thesis, critical pedagogy examines the social, cultural, and political contexts of learning and works to identify and disrupt privilege and oppression and to foster social justice. Personally, I did not encounter these ideas in my own BEd program; indeed, I did not learn about critical pedagogy until I took such a course in my MEd program. From what I gather, some programs in Ontario may have required courses with a strong critical pedagogy focus depending upon the professoriate at a given university, while others may have electives that reach only a small proportion of students. This is a shame. Only a proportion of teachers will pursue a MEd and even of these, how many actually take a critical pedagogy course? This simply is not good enough.

A course with critical pedagogy content could provide pre-service teachers with the tools to recognize privilege and oppressive social relations and pedagogical

approaches that would enable them to critically and creatively reimagine both the explicit and implicit curriculum, including physical space. It should include critical approaches to bullying that make clear that the targets of bullying are usually those without the advantages of privilege (e.g., race, class, gender, sexuality) and that effective responses must address these systemic issues (Walton, 2005). Including fat bullying in the mix, as well as critical information on fatphobia, fat acceptance, and Health at Every Size could be very enlightening. As such, a course like this could help BEd students build a foundation on which to confront all types of bullying, including the bullying of fat youth that is currently not merely tolerated but actively encouraged (Weinstock & Krehbiel, 2009).

Participants in my study revealed that they had had no exposure to critical pedagogy during the first term of their BEd. From personal communications, I suspect that some of the participants will be enrolled in a course taught by a professor who intends to introduce critical pedagogy and who has, in fact, asked me to do a guest lecture on fat bullying for her. But this feels like far too little to make a huge difference. I also know that this particular program is currently being redesigned as part of the shift from a one-year to a two-year BEd program and I have heard that social justice education will be foundational to a required course and infused throughout other courses. I hope that this will indeed be the case.

Nonetheless, given fat studies is new, fat pedagogy is on the fringes of even critical pedagogy, and obesity discourse is so dominant, there is no guarantee that fatphobia will even be introduced let alone challenged in a general course that tackles

oppression and bullying from a systemic perspective. This brings me to my next recommendation.

2. Ensure that fat pedagogy is infused throughout Health and Physical Education courses. Some Canadian provinces, namely Alberta and Prince Edward Island, have curriculum content that promotes inclusion of all body shapes and sizes; as such, the curriculum, at least in theory if not in practice, works to deconstruct thin privilege and create space for learning about the Health at Every Size movement (Robertson & Thomson, 2012). In contrast, the curriculum in Ontario and the other provinces is far less progressive (Cameron et al., 2014; Robertson & Thomson, 2012; Sykes & McPhail, 2011). Imagine if students learned about the inaccuracy and political construction of the BMI (Burkhauser & Cawley, 2006), about fat oppression and thin privilege (Bacon, 2009), how weight stigma negatively impacts one's health more than weight (Burgard, 2009; Schafer & Ferraro, 2011; Wann, 2009), and how fat children and youth are routinely excluded and bullied in physical education classes which often leads to avoidance of physical education altogether (Cameron et al., 2014; Russell et al., 2013; Sykes & McPhail, 2011).

Peterson et al. (2012) found that, in particular, “physical educators (e.g. PE teachers, coaches, and students in training to become PE teachers or coaches) endorse negative beliefs about overweight individuals” (p. 178). This was echoed in my findings. These negative beliefs are based on common misconceptions about health and weight that evidently need to be deconstructed in teacher education in Health and Physical Education. We need to disrupt the healthy living discourse that is so prevalent, and help foster in pre-service teachers the desire and ability to teach about health holistically,

rather than teaching students a single formula for how to be healthy (Quennerstedt, Burrows & Maivorsdotter, 2010). Teachers need to focus more on deconstructing contemporary understandings of health and create opportunities for students to investigate various ways of improving overall health (Gard, 2003). It is therefore integral for Health and Physical Education professors to take a leadership role in ensuring that they disrupt fat oppression, including that embedded in healthy living discourse and that they mentor future teachers on how to include *all* children and youth.

3. Offer workshops on fat bullying. If the two recommendations above were actually implemented, this third recommendation would not be quite as necessary, although providing workshops specific to fat bullying would be helpful nonetheless. And such workshops would be particularly helpful if it takes time to implement the first two recommendations. As my findings demonstrated, participants were unsure of how specifically to address fat bullying and Walton (2005) argued that bullying could not be addressed in general terms. As noted above, bullying is rooted in systemic forces of oppression that targets specific individuals. Without addressing the underlying reason for the bullying, the behaviour might be disciplined but the prejudice that led to the behaviour remains unchanged.

Pedagogical strategies that teach students to embrace, celebrate, and learn from the differences within student populations is important (Walton, 2005). While specific strategies for addressing fat bullying may not yet have been stated clearly in one resource at this point, these certainly could be developed and there is much to be built on if the critical bullying literature and fat studies literature are brought together. In addition,

further research on the lived experiences of those have been fat bullied may result in useful ideas.

Conclusion

My research identified and explored participants' experiences with fat bullying and the potential impacts on their future profession as teachers. Through interviews and critical discourse analysis, the data illustrated that while participants would not tolerate fat bullying, they had nonetheless internalized fatphobia, which was unfortunately not disrupted in their BEd. (I now am thinking what we need is not a Bachelor of Education but a Bachelor of Re-Education!) As stated in my recommendations, teacher education needs to be revamped by offering required courses in critical pedagogy to address the root causes of bullying, by seriously redesigning existing Health and Physical Education courses, and by offering workshops on specific strategies for addressing fat bullying. In doing so, we can proactively educate students about fat oppression, the dangers of fatphobia, and the potential for all bodies to be valued in our society.

For me, personally, as an aspiring educator I wish I had been introduced to critical pedagogy before reaching the graduate level. I am still struggling to deconstruct and challenge the socially accepted "knowledge" about fatness that I have internalized. Dominant obesity discourse is perpetually reproduced in the media, often in ways that are incredibly cruel and mean; only rarely are depictions of fatness positive and self-actualizing although thankfully these are becoming more common (for recent examples in Canadian media, see Anon, 2013; Ashenburg, 2013; Walton & Russell, 2014). Being able to see fat through a critical lens has been very helpful to me in challenging my own fatphobia. As someone who labels herself as fat, I grapple with what others see (an

“average” weight woman) and with what I see (a fat woman who has the potential to be fatter in the future). I constantly have to fight the urge to criticize my body even while I am encouraging fat acceptance with my friends, family, and now readers of this thesis.

For these reasons, I wish my health and physical education courses had taught me to accept and respect my body as well as all the other diverse bodies in the world. Had I had a better understanding of the complexity of health when I was younger, I may not have internalized the fatphobia, felt such shame about my body, and emotionally beat myself up as much if not more so than my bullies did. I realize now that it is fortunate that I was even introduced to fat studies and fat pedagogy in my MEd. I can easily imagine having completed my MEd elsewhere and even having written a thesis about how to fight the “obesity epidemic” and I shudder at the thought. I now hope to inspire others as I myself have been so that we all think more critically about the “taken-for-granted” assumptions we have absorbed about fatness as well as all other forms of social difference with the goal of becoming not only more aware of difference but also being able to accept and embrace it.

I have already begun taking action in my journey to create awareness. For example, this term I was asked to guest lecture in two BEd “Foundations and Issues” classes in which I discussed critical pedagogy and fat studies, and shared with students the results of my thesis. Going forward, I have also started work on articles based on my thesis for both academic audiences (e.g., for journals and a forthcoming edited book on fat pedagogy) and popular audiences (e.g., for the campus newsletter that goes out to local pre-service teachers). Further, capitalizing on the current flux in Ontario pre-service teacher education caused by the newly mandated two-year BEd program, now seems like

an ideal time to promote the recommendations in my thesis, including working on the development of a course that would create space for fostering awareness of fatphobia, sharing strategies to appropriately address incidents of fat bullying, and building acceptance of body diversity. I am excited to be at this stage in my journey and I hope that some readers of this thesis will be keen to join me.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Letter

Dear Lakehead teacher candidates,

I am a Master of Education student at Lakehead University and I am conducting my thesis research on the experiences of female pre-service teachers who have been bullied because of their heavier weight. In order to make changes to how bullying in schools is addressed, more research on weight-based bullying is required.

I am inviting any female pre-service teachers who have been targeted when they were in elementary and/or secondary school because of their size to participate in this study. Your knowledge and experience are important and your participation could help address bullying in schools. As well, it might be useful to you personally to give voice to the bullying you experienced.

Your commitment would involve one 45-60 minute audio-taped interview, which I will transcribe personally, conduct in person in a private location on campus sometime in the month of September 2013. A short follow-up interview *may* be requested for clarification purposes in person or via e-mail sometime in September or October 2013, but your participation in an additional interview would be at your discretion.

My research has been approved by Lakehead University's Research Ethics Board and follows strict ethical guidelines to ensure confidentiality, anonymity, and your safety. If you agree to participate, you may choose to decline to answer any question or to withdraw at any time. (More information on ethics and research procedures will be offered upon request and will be covered in the official cover letter you will receive if you are interested in participating.)

If you are potentially interested in being a part of this study, please email me.

Thank you,

Hannah McNinch, MEd candidate
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Appendix B: Description of Study

Dear [potential participant],

I would like to invite you to participate in a study to explore your experiences of being bullied for your heavier weight. My Masters in Education thesis is called “Bullying of overweight girls in school: Implications for pre-service teacher education.”⁵ The purpose of this research is to investigate how bullying of overweight girls is experienced, how it is addressed (or not) in schools, as well as how these experiences might affect your intended teaching philosophy and practice.

If you choose to participate, I will arrange a time to meet in person at a location and time of your convenience for an interview that will last approximately 45-60 minutes. These interviews will be semi-structured allowing for dialogue and sharing of ideas between me as the researcher and you as the participant. I will send you some of the interview questions one day in advance of the interview for your reflection. I will begin by sharing my own experience with being bullied for my heavier weight.

I plan to audio-record the interview. There is no foreseeable risk, harm, or inconvenience to you to be involved in this study. While I do not expect this to be the case, should you find the interview emotionally difficult, a counselor will be available to discuss this with you and be of assistance. Your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, as well as decline to answer any questions.

To ensure your anonymity, data collected will be kept confidential and pseudonyms will be used in my thesis, any associated writing, and presentations. Hard copies of transcripts and a USB with the electronic files of the interviews will remain stored in a secure location in the Faculty of Education at Lakehead University for five years, and then will be destroyed. The findings of this project will be made available to you at your request upon the completion of the project. The completed thesis will be available in the Education Library at Lakehead University.

Please complete and sign the attached consent form. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me (phone: (705) 358-8825, email: hmcninch@lakeheadu.ca), or direct your inquiries to my faculty supervisor, Dr. Connie Russell (phone: (807) 343-8049, email: crussell@lakeheadu.ca), or Susan Wright, Research Ethics and Administration Officer, Lakehead University (phone: (807) 343-8283, susan.wright@lakeheadu.ca).

Thank you,

Hannah McNinch

⁵ This title, as explained for the Review of Ethics Board, acts an alternative for participants.

Appendix C: Consent Form For Participants

My signature below indicates that I have read and understood the accompanying explanation of “Bullying of overweight girls in school: Implications for pre-service teacher education.” It also indicates that I agree to participate in this study by Hannah McNinch, and that I understand the following ethical considerations:

- My participation is voluntary and I have the right to withdraw at any time.
- I have the right to choose to decline to answer any question.
- There is no apparent risk of physical or psychological harm.
- All information gathered about me will be kept confidential.
- My identity will be protected by the use of pseudonyms in this thesis, any associated writing, and presentations.
- The data will be securely stored with the Faculty of Education at Lakehead University, and after five years the data will be destroyed.
- The findings of this project will be made available to me at my request upon the completion of the project. The completed thesis will be available at the Education Library at Lakehead University.

Name: _____ (Please Print)

Signature: _____

Date: _____

If you would like a synopsis of the thesis, please provide your email or mailing address here:

Appendix D: Interview Outline

I will open by sharing a story of when I was bullied for my heavier weight. The interview will take place in a private room and I am committed to providing a safe and judgement-free place to discuss participants' experiences.

After collecting demographic data (name, age, year in program), I will ask the following questions, as well as probing questions to elicit more detail if needed:

Opening Questions

1. How do you define "health"?
2. Knowing that you've only just begun your program, how, if at all, have your courses approached health education?
3. How, if at all, have your courses approached bullying?
4. What are your thoughts on the so-called "obesity epidemic"?

Experiences of Fat Bullying

If you're ready now, I would like to hear about any experiences you have had with being bullied for your weight:

1. What is your first memory of being targeted for bullying in school because of your weight?
 - a. Please describe this incident in as much detail as possible.
 - b. Where did this incident occur?
 - c. When did this incident occur?
 - d. Who was involved, including bully(ies) and/or bystander(s)?
 - e. Do you feel there were any other reasons for you being bullied in this instance besides your weight? If so, please describe.
 - f. How did you react?
2. How did you feel about this incident at the time?
3. How do you feel about it now?
4. How, if at all, did witnesses to this incident react at the time?
 - a. How did you feel about those reactions at the time?
 - b. How do you feel about those reactions now?
5. How, if at all, did peers who were not there but heard about this incident react at the time, or later?

6. How, if at all, did teacher(s) respond to this incident?
 - a. How did you feel about the teacher's response to this incident at the time?
 - b. How, if at all, do you feel about the teacher's response to this incident now?
7. How, if at all, did administrative staff (secretaries, vice principal, principal, etc.) respond to this incident?
 - a. How did you feel about the administrative staff's response to this incident at the time?
 - b. How do you feel about the administrative staff's response to this incident now?
8. Why do you think teachers and staff responded to this incident this way?

I will then ask participants if they would like to share additional incidents of weight-based bullying that they have experienced, using the same format as above.

Implications

1. How, if at all, did these experiences of weight-based bullying influence your decision to become a teacher?
2. How, if at all, did these experiences influence your ideas about health?
3. How, if at all, do you intend to promote health in your school?
4. When you see overweight children or youth now, what do you feel or think?
5. Looking forward, how will you interact with fat youth as a result of your own experiences of weight-based bullying?
6. Looking forward, how might you as a teacher respond if you witness an incident of weight-based bullying?
 - a. Please explain why you would respond in this way.