COMPULSORY FITNESS AND NATION BUILDING: ANTI-FAT BIAS IN CANADIAN HUMAN RIGHTS LAW AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM

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A Research Paper submitted to the Graduate Program in Critical Disability Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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Graduate Program in Critical Disability Studies
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Contents

Abstract

This Major Research Paper (MRP) investigates the roots of anti-fat bias in Physical Education. Divided into three distinct chapters, this MRP begins by outlining current themes and understanding related to fat-bias in Physical Education through a scoping review of available academic literature. With the consideration that the Canadian public education system is funded by and overseen by the provincial government, the second chapter considers how fat discrimination is understood in the context of legal discrimination in Canada in an effort to better understand the vulnerability that students are subjected to when discriminated against in an educational setting. The last chapter of this MRP explores the grade 9 Physical Education curriculum for the 10 Canadian provinces through open-coding of anti-fat bias and neoliberal/citizenship rhetoric.

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Introduction

A parent approaches me during curriculum night, she says "My daughter is so happy you are her teacher and I am so glad you're fat. You're a great role model". My face flushes with embarrassment. Did this parent just call me fat? Do my students think I'm fat? I am confused and continue to smile my way through the night. I cry on the drive home. It was hard for me to reckon with the power behind the statement this parent made. Afterall, she was glad that her daughter had a "fat-role model", but that is not who I wanted to be. I wanted to be a sixth-grade teacher; did I have to have a body while doing it? It was then that I realized my body was a location, a text unto itself. No matter what I told myself about my body, it could be seen and interpreted by others and perhaps most interestingly now, by twelve-year-old girls.

I began the Critical Disability Studies program as a white, twenty-something, fat-identifying, middle school teacher in Toronto, Ontario. At the time I was teaching grade six at a single gender, private Catholic school. I became curious as to how my students were engaging with their growing bodies and a Physical Education curriculum that seemed to prioritize "fitness" and "health" that resulted in many of my students resisting participation. The resistance to participate in Physical Education classes by twelve-year olds inspired me to take their concerns and needs seriously and examine my own resistance and fatness. I was not their Physical Education teacher and thus became an ally against forced exercise and movement. My own fatness became a location of learning, acceptance, safety and curiosity as I used Critical Disability Studies coursework to challenge the societal and moral attributes of fat people in the context of disability. Through my own educational pursuits in the Critical Disability Studies program at York University, I can say with confidence that fat kids in the Ontario education system are vulnerable to purposeful disembodiment through curriculum and policy. I suspect they are vulnerable across the country. Fat kids are targets of bullying, examples of failed parenting, cause for national campaigns to fight obesity and underestimated by both peers and teachers within the education system. While exploring curriculum and policy documents I became aware of a linguistic veil used to disguise the disciplinary nature of movement-related policy and physical education curriculum meant to appeal to both participants and community stakeholders. This semantic strategy redirects the focus away from how deeply rooted our education system is in colonial ideologies of the body by

promoting individual health and personal care and thus requires more thorough investigation.

This paper will address how Physical Education as a subject in school is defined by the Medical Model of disability with a scoping review of current research regarding anti-fat bias in education. We will delve further into the relationship of anti-fatness and embodiment by exploring how fat-discrimination and fat-phobia have operated prior to formal Physical Education classes, as a colonial response to non-whiteness and white failure. It will position fatness within the neoliberal context of labor and citizenship which has been used to justify oppression, exclusion and fat-phobia. We will examine how fatness has been ascribed moral attributes by a colonial state ultimately seeking white nation-building evident in legal framework and precedent. Lastly, this Major Research Paper will position the school as a location of biopolitics that looks to discipline non-white bodies and punish failing white bodies until they have ascertained acceptable whiteness through close reading and open coding of Canadian provincial Physical Education Curriculum. Holistically, the three chapters of this Major Research Paper contend with the liminal relationship between embodiment and citizenship. Ultimately questioning; how does the state utilize institutions to distribute power based on individual physical embodiment, specifically exploring the implications for fat-people and fat-children?

Chapter 1: Anti-Fat-Bias in Physical Education: A Scoping Review

As a child I attended a local public elementary school just outside of Toronto, and in grade seven had the misfortune of having Mr. DiBuono as my Homeroom and Physical Education teacher. Like most middle school students, I had no command of my growing body; already fat, awkward and unfamiliar. However, I was studious and stayed out of trouble. Mr. DiBuono was a soccer fanatic which meant our Phys.Ed class resembled soccer practices for the majority of the year. One fateful day I was required to lead the class in a warm-up "run". I fearfully complied and began to move my body around the track. I could hear my peers whispering insults about me; "she's too fat to run", "I could crawl faster than this" and "I think she's going to cause an earthquake" . Out of the corner of my eye I spotted Mr. DiBuono, bored and unimpressed. A few hours later, safely back in Homeroom I had an essay returned with a nearly perfect mark. Mr. DiBuono stopped at my desk and looked at me, "This is what you're good for, Olivia. Sitting and writing; just stick to that".

When thinking about the broad spectrum of Physical Education there is often focus on the holistic gains a typical student would experience. Moments of leadership, skill building and character development. All of these skills and lessons are important, nuanced and not traditionally integrated in the curriculum. Despite the potential gains of Physical Education class, we must consider the ethics of a course centered on the body as a potential source of vulnerability for the fat child or adolescent. This chapter will discuss the results of a scoping review of current literature regarding anti-fat bias in Physical Education. The papers used for this review were collected via Omni online database using the search terms, "anti-fat bias AND physical education" which yielded 108 results, "anti-fat bias AND physical education AND elementary schools" with 1 result, "anti-fat bias AND physical education AND secondary schools" totaled 8 results and "anti-fat bias in education" with 178 results.

These results were hand-searched which resulted in 30 articles and 1 book chapter used for this scoping review. Only published academic articles were considered. Articles that appeared satisfactory based on title and abstract were read but not included if the articles advocated for physical activity as pediatric obesity prevention and medical intervention for weight loss. Articles that reported on obesity management strategies to as a resolution to experiences of fat-bias were also excluded. The hand-search excluded articles that explored anti-fat bias at the post-secondary or professional learning level.

This scoping review outlines current understanding of the cause of anti-fat bias in Physical Education and suggested treatment of implicit and explicit discrimination. Overwhelmingly, the literature demonstrates the authoritarian nature of an educational

setting combined with global anti-fat attitudes and normative healthism is mirrored in both school culture and curriculum. This allows anti-fat bias and fat-phobia to thrive not just among peers but between teachers and fat-students. We will argue that anti-fat bias and fat-phobia within the Physical Education space relies on an ecosystem that is deeply embedded in normative healthism reproduced by the Medical Model of disability, a neoliberalist attitude of deviance and the school as a location of Biopower (Foucault,1978). Lastly, we will outline limitations in current literature, specifically how current research fails to thoroughly address how minority students are impacted by anti-fat bias and fat-phobia.

Results

The Medical Model of disability according to Oliver (1990), identifies this understanding of disability as the medically identified impairment or deviation from a medical standard and non-impaired body. Due to the medical industry's proclivity to quantify bodies using weight and measurements, the body is easily limited to a numerical composition (Stoll, 2019). Ultimately lending this data to averages, standards and deviations. Guided by these principles, Physical Education has long been influenced by medical processes and are predisposed to quantify, categorize and regulate bodies (Crmona-Marquez, 2020; Finn et al, 2020; Puhl et al, 2007; Kim, 2012). In the last twenty years remediating the 'obesity epidemic' has filtered into Physical Education classrooms as the global solution to solving childhood obesity (Varea & Underwood, 2016, Pringle & Powell, 2016). This has undoubtedly impacted the implicit and explicit bias of Physical Education teachers towards fat-students (O'Brien, 2007;Readdy, 2016;

Ehlert, 2015). Whether the student is considered fat by acquired metrics such as their BMI, or it is their perceived fatness, Physical Education teachers have been tasked with facilitating weight-reducing practices among students of all ages (Carmona-Marquez et al., 2020) . Pedagogical resources and training regarding how best to address the 'obesity epidemic' among children relies on the Medical Model understanding of obesity, which provides educators with an inadequate understanding of how fatness occurs in children (Lynag, 2015). The oversimplification of obesity that is used to educate Physical Education teachers, trickles down into implicit and explicit biases reproduced by the teachers themselves and also appears in curriculum and policy (Lynag, 2015; O'Brien, 2007, Finn et al., 2020, Martinez-Lopez et al.,2017). In fact, the transfer of implicit and explicit bias from teachers to students further endangers fat-students, creating hostile environments that are conducive to bullying, discrimination and self-hatred (Sykes & McPhail, 2008; Pause, 2019).

In the Health Education Journal, *(Can we) get together? Fat kids and physical education*, Cat Pause writes poignantly about systematically oppressive Physical Education classes. Pause cites their own experiences to illustrate the damaging legacy of Physical Education, "Physical education in compulsory schooling has long been criticised for being a site of normative healthism, portraying the idea that health is a controllable state by each individual and that each individual has a moral obligation to be in good health" (p. 665). What we glean from Pause (2019) is that Physical Education teachers that ascribe to the Medical Model of disability inevitably promote movement as

weight-loss, and create environments limited to non-disabled bodies, are all to be considered an active form of violence against fat-students.

In the Physical Education setting, the Medical Model reproduces a binary understanding of the body. There is a "healthy" body and an "unhealthy" body (Glock, 2021; Sykes & McPhail, 2008, Pringle & Powell, 2016; O'Brien, 2007; Puhl et al., 2007). Largely, the goal of Physical Education is to teach students how to maintain a "healthy" body, implying that each person has the ability to attain the same 'optimal' body (Carmona-Marquez et al.,2020; Pringle & Powell, 2016).

What was made clear throughout the literature, this has much much deeper roots in how bodies have been historically segregated into categories and characterized as deviant (Varea & Underwood, 2016). This particular reformation of an "unhealthy" body is justified because the binary reproduced by the Medical Model has moralistic implications of two forms of embodiment; the "good" and "healthy" body is distinct from the "bad" and "unhealthy" body. Organizing bodies within a morality system has been used to justify punishment, discipline, "people's experiences of being publicly weighed exemplify how fat phobia strives to discipline the "unhealthy" fat body." (Sykes et. al, 2008, p. 67). Disciplining a fat-body can take several forms including, fat-shaming by a teacher, isolation from peer groups, public humiliation or encouraged disordered eating (Sykes et al., 2008). All while under the guise of encouraging *health* or *fitness*. In the Journal for European Physical Education Review, Carmona-Marquez et. al. discuss the impact of anti-fat bias and power dynamics of teachers and fat-students. Anti-fat *bias in*

secondary school teachers: Are physical education teachers more biased than mathematics teachers?, the culpability of teachers' is further explored;

While teachers are certainly culpable, their participation in oppressing and discriminating against fat-students only proves their personal adherence to normative healthism and anti-fat attitudes. Some of the literature vilifies the Physical Education teacher as the perpetrator of anti-fat bias/ attitudes and fat oppression (Carmona-Marquez et al., 2020; Sykes & McPhail, 2008; Varea & Underwood, 2016; O'Brien, 2007; Pause 2019; Tinning, 2020; Maiano et al., 2017). However, other authors bring a more nuanced understanding of how anti-fat bias and anti-fat attitudes have gained traction in the education system. Puhel et al illustrate the culpability of Physical Education teachers as conduits for larger systems of oppression such as racism, classism and sexism..

> Neumark-Sztainer et. al. (1999), for example, found that approximately a quarter of high school teachers surveyed held the belief that obese people were more impulsive, less organized, and had more family problems than non-obese people. In the same study, 28% of teachers felt that becoming obese is the worst thing that could happen to a person. When the perspective of the potential victims of these discriminatory acts was investigated, it was found that 27% of a sample of adolescents undergoing treatment to lose weight claimed to have been victimized by their own teachers (Puhl et. al., 2013). p. 2

None of the literature denied the existence of anti-fat bias in schools, specifically in the Physical Education space. While some articles focused on the types of bias experienced by students (implicit vs. explicit) (Ehler, 2015; O'Brien, 2007, Finn et al., 2020;

Rykavina & Weidong, 2010; Nutter et al., 2019; Greenleaf et al., 2008), few articles sought out the root of anti-fat attitudes in an effort to explore the school as a location of systemic oppression.

Varea and Underwood (2016) highlight a Neoliberal framework that establishes and protects anti-fat and discriminatory practices. They trace the simplification of obesity taught to educators as a direct result of Neoliberal individualism that posits personal choices as a matter of free will. Varea and Underwood argue that this discourse not only allows deflection from other forms of systemic oppression that may contribute to fatness, but that encouraging a neoliberal view of oneself within the education system works to benefit a nation state;

> According to neoliberal discourses, individuals are often convinced that they are shaping their own life conditions. However, this is a covert technique used to govern individuals by persuading them to make meaning of their lives as if they were the result of their own individual choices…With regards to health, neoliberalism embodies risk discourses which reduce one's health to the sum of individual choices. The healthy neoliberal citizen chooses good health by making choices informed by the unproblematic perspectives on the body, diet, and health provided by biomedical science. (p. 467)

Varea and Underwood (2016) continue to explore how the fat body is therefore understood as a compound of poor choices; a moral failing that manifests physically. This individual failure therefore, can be remedied through behavior management and incentive to make "good" or "healthy" choices. It is agreed across the literature that the moral

implications of fatness not only worsen tropes and stereotypes of fat-people, but justify remediation or punishment of the deviant body.

Anti-fat bias upheld by any subject teacher creates a barrier to equitable teaching standards and should be considered discrimination. However, the system of discipline against fat-bodies in Physical Education is layered to either cure the body from its deviance or discourage fat-students from participating, demonstrating failure to conform and ultimately exemplifying failure of fat-bodies. Turning to Carmona-Marquez et. al. (2020);

> ... since many of the instances of victimization suffered by overweight youngsters occur in the context of PE [Physical Education] classes, it is likely that those who experience these episodes of discrimination may acquire an aversion to PA [Physical Activity], which may subsequently decrease their enjoyment of and motivation to take physical exercise. (pg. 4)

This tactic is used to successfully propagate a hierarchy of bodies and reflect a neoliberal understanding of individualism. In the article, '*You are just an idiot for not doing any physical activity now': Health and Physical Education teachers' constructions of fatness* (2016), Vrea and Underwood study pre-service Health and Physical Education teachers, fat-phobia and the impact of anti-fat bias on fat students. Their findings reveal that pre-service Health and Physical Education teachers hold complex biases against fat-students. These biases are deeply entrenched in societal norms and are deeply connected to paternalistic structures and moral judgements of the body,

> The construction of fat as achieved deviance led participants to employ discourses of morality in their discussions of bodies. For example, Judith stated that she was 'a little repulsed by people that are overweight'. She also stated that she did not know 'why most people can't actually have a decent body'. Through this statement, Judith implied that there is also an indecent body…. The fat body is marked as the 'other and deviant' body and the non-fat body is normalized. Most of the participants constructed discourses associated with fat bodies being disgusting or repulsive. p. 472

As we understand that Physical Education teachers may be predisposed to anti-fat bias, curriculum is not used to reform these concepts, but is used to justify the discrimination of fatness.

Several articles address the undue hardship faced by fat students in Physical Education settings whether it be public shame, bullying, social isolation or internalized fat-phobia (Faith et al., 2002; Weidong & Rukavina, 2008; Puhl et al., 2012, Pause, 2019; Varea & Underwood, 2016;). Several articles cite the emotional turmoil faced by fat students in Physical Education classes as a singularly valid reason for physical activity avoidance (Sykes & McPhail, 2008, Varea & Underwood, 2016; Tinning; 2020, Weidong & Rukavina, 2008). The perceived moral failure of the fat-body presents an opportunity for fat students to be targeted for remediation by teachers or school-wide programming, which only conflates anti-fat discriminatory practices with moral salvation ((Sykes & McPhail, 2008, Varea & Underwood, 2016; Tinning; 2020, Weidong & Rukavina, 2008).

Varea and Underwood (2016) explore how these cultural transgressions that are supported by people in authority and curriculum or policy (which acts as an authority) serve a wider purpose of surveillance as an extension of biopower. Varea and Underwood (2016) write,

> Foucault's concept of biopower explores a particular way to exercise power. Biopower acts by governing and regulating individuals and populations through practices related to the body. Biopower attempts to control individuals and populations through practices that 'teach' individuals how to be 'healthy' (and consequently) 'good' citizens. As a result, biopower analyzes the constitution of subjects and their processes of normalization. p. 472

The brief, yet powerful exploration of how surveillance operates among fat and non-fat students alike within Physical Education spaces, offered by Varea and Underwood (2016) is a distinct finding in the examined literature.

Discussion

Few articles position that bullying and anti-fat bias are the central concern with regard to socially excluding fat-students from physical activity, given that they would most benefit from the physical activity due to 'excess weight' (Tingstrom, 2015; Weidong, 2015). This approach to addressing anti-fat bias within the Physical Education space only reiterates the danger of attitudinal oppression that remains married to binary systems of 'health'/ 'illness', 'good'/ 'bad', 'right/wrong' and is in itself anti-fat. None of the literature directly associates or interrogates the similarity in the urgency for anti-bullying campaigns to the urgency to combat childhood obesity which asks us to

question how bullying truly operates in Physical Education spaces and how students are often co-opted as the perpetrators of bullying, when in light of the literature collected for the scoping review, persons of authority; namely teachers, are often bullies themselves.

In *Addressing the Needs of Overweight Students in Elementary Physical Education: Creating an Environment of Care and Success*, Tingstrom (2015) addresses Physical Educators and their role in creating safer spaces for participation by providing alternative approaches to typical Physical Education classes. However, this piece is littered with microaggressions towards fat children. One example of Tingstrom's microaggression reads as such, "a physical educator who expresses care by encouraging, complimenting or acknowledging an overweight or obese student's effort may motivate the student to work harder" (p.12). Tingstrom offers that kindness and equitable care will produce an obese student that "works harder". This language is coded to maintain neoliberal ideals that a "good" fat student is one that "works" towards not being fat. Tingstrom (2015) concludes this article by writing "A physical educator's interactions and the classroom environment they create with overweight students may be the most important factors in helping students to develop a physically active lifestyle and value being active for a lifetime" (p. 12). Once again, this is problematic simply because Tingstrom (2015) asserts a simplification of fatness that is reduced to individual will to not be fat and that the individual's moral failing can be remediated by a caring and encouraging teacher. In this statement Tingstrom denies the complexities of fatness that include the intersectional experiences of race, class, gender and the social determinants of

health by further engaging in rhetoric that maintains the role of the Physical Education teacher as the salvation for fat children.

In *The Association Between Spanish Physical Education Teachers' Self-Efficacy Expectations and Their Attitudes Toward Overweight and Obese Students* (2017), Martinez-Lopez et al. write about specific biases that fat students face in the Physical Education space. This research adds to understanding how Physical Education teachers personally manage tolerance of and inclusion of fat students. Despite being informative and useful to this scoping review, Martinez-Lopez et al. (2017) affirm "schools are the ideal setting to model healthy eating habits, weight control and promotion of physical activity among youth" (p.221). This confirms the school, specifically Physical Education spaces, as a location of biopower (Vaera and Underwood, 2016).

It is of note that the research being gathered comes from distinct disciplines that may explain the finding of anti-fat sentiments and transgressions within anti-fat bias research. Literature associated with medical or scientific disciplines demonstrated a clear Medical Model understanding of fatness in youth and therefore looked to understand biases as a means of overcoming the barriers to obesity intervention (Tingstrom, 2015; Weidong, 2015, Finch & Blankenship, 2011; Kim, 2012). Literature associated with Education did not have a strong leaning. Literature associated with sociological or cultural disciplines would engage with systems of oppression and look to understand fat-bias as a symptom of power-relations. It is important to understand that the body of work that refers to anti-fat bias can itself be anti-fat. While the scoping review offered

limitations in an effort to focus on pertinent and relevant information, it is reflective that the discourse itself is at odds.

A final reflection on the data collected remains the lack of awareness of the complexity of fatness and numerous factors that result in body-variance. Several articles referred to different systems of oppression such as racism, sexism and classism as similar forms of oppression that may take place within a school system (Dotto, 2020; Nutter et al., Pringle & Powell, 2016, Sykes & McPhail, 2008). However, there was no thorough or quantified research of how fatness and fat-oppression is used to code bodies as deviant and how minority students may be impacted by this additional form of punishment and exclusion. Finn, Seymour and Phillips (2020) identify that fat students were often perceived as academically weak or stereotyped as less productive by non-specific subject teachers. However, this understanding of how anti-fat bias transcends Physical Education spaces did not account for how these students, while coded for fatness, may also be perceived or identified as racialized, queer, disabled or from lower-socioeconomic status. This framework around how anti-fat bias exists in schools remains all too simplistic despite the confirmation that anti-fat bias impacts students' daily lives.

In *Unbearable Lessons: Contesting Fat Phobia in Physical Education,* Sykes and McPhail (2008) address anti-fat bias as a way of forming boundaries, in-groups and out-groups writing,

> Fat-phobia in physical education stems, in part, from discursive processes that seek to maintain a precarious boundary between being fat and not being fat…Fat-phobic underpinnings of the obesity epidemic involve the abjection of

> supposedly unhealthy, unathletic and unskilled bodies from the imagined spaces of physical education and health education…Thus, healthy living comes to require the elimination of fatness from the psychic, social and national body. (p. 71).

Sykes and McPhail (2008) work through Physical Education's fixation on the healthy productive body, coding bias as the creation of boundaries around citizenship. However, they do not go further in addressing how anti-fat bias works to punish White bodies back into suitable citizenship status as no longer fat, and exclude racialized and minority bodies as unsuitable for citizenship status altogether.

Conclusion

This scoping review established anti-fat bias as a priority to address in the K-12 Physical Education space. While the cause of anti-fat bias was not unanimously addressed or even sought to be understood, fat students are vulnerable to anti-fat attitudes that undoubtedly shape their educational career. There remains to be an intersectional exploration of what Physical Education means to Canadian students in the context of health as a requirement to citizenship and a punitive process in boundary making. Canadian national policy on Physical Education and Physical Education curricula would be an appropriate location for analysis to explore the operation of anti-fat bias as biopower among children. There is a much needed analysis of how fat-phobia in the Canadian political and legal landscape has been used as a tool of discrimination and othering outside of education, which will be explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 2. Exploring the History of Anti-Fat Oppression: Personhood & the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms

In 2020 my eighty-seven year old grandmother locks eyes with me from across the dinner table. Her face flushes with excitement. She says, "You have to eat one of everything on the table, it's for the baby". The promise of a new life gave my grandparents hope. Eighty-seven and ninety-three respectively, the isolation they were enduring brought on by the Coronavirus combined with a long winter was lethal. So we effectively "bubbled" with them and visited often. Until my pregnancy, I had never had the permission to eat without abandon. Perhaps I still do not have that external permission to eat for myself; only as a vessel. Tangled moments like this followed me as I navigated making space for my already fat, pregnant and growing body.

It is now 2023, and once again I find myself fat and pregnant. Except this pregnancy includes the diagnosis of 'hyperemesis'; consistent nausea and sickness that's resulted in weight loss. The doctor describes the baby as a "leech"; haphazard bedside manner. How peculiar. This new life is taking what they need, taking up space, taking up time and presence. Thriving but not contributing, taking without giving; a leech. How fast we divorce the body from the person.

What is this new life if not the intimate beginnings of personhood?

Introduction

We have established that anti-fat bias exists within the education system, specifically in Physical Education classrooms where the body is central to subjugation. As we look to understand how anti-fat bias operates to control and define bodies in the elementary and secondary school setting, it serves this research to primarily explore the historical context for which fatness became a vehicle of discrimination and control. This chapter asserts that anti-fat attitudes and practices do not exist in the Canadian education system in a vacuum but are a reflection of cultural thought that has developed overtime. And secondly, the Canadian education system is a political entity and must be analyzed as such to be appropriately explored as a location of Biopower and nation building. It is in fact the federal Canadian legal system that governs and protects the rights of children in seeking education (Education Act, 2012, c E-0.3 s.198), and it is the Provincial and Territorial political system that provides school-specific governance, policy framework and curriculum to students in kindergarten through grade 12. Therefore, we must take the time to understand how fat discrimination is treated by the political and legal system in order to understand how it shapes the education system through policy, curriculum and attitude.

Weight, whether considered in excess or not, has been long conflated with other attributes across time. Fraser (2010) writes in *The Inner Corset: A Brief History of Fat in the United States*, that the combination of the industrial revolution and immigration influenced the social construction of fatness;

> People who had too little to eat now had plenty, and those who had a tendency to put on weight began to do so. When it became possible for people of modest

> means to become plump, being fat no longer was a sign of prestige. Well-to-do Americans of northern European extraction wanted to be able to distinguish themselves, physically and racially from stockier immigrants. As anthropologist Marget Mackenzie notes, the status symbols flipped: it became chic to be thin and all too ordinary to be overweight. (p. 12).

Fraser's insight requires us to understand weight as a cultural marker of class and race as early as the 1800s. It is through this lens that we can have greater appreciation for the root of the discrimination faced by fat people and the profundity of the claim of Physical Education as an extension of biopower made by Vaera and Underwood (2016). While fatness may be the feature of exclusion or oppressive treatment, often defined numerically or in medical standards, it has become deeply conflated with issues of status, race, citizenship and morality,

> Americans believed that it was not only a sign of class to be thin, but also a sign of morality. There was a long tradition in American culture that suggested that indulging the body and its appetites was immoral, and that denying the flesh was a sure way to become closer to God (p. 12).

With the rise of Neoliberalism, fatness was viewed as a sign of poor citizenship, lack of work ethic and failure. In "Understanding Fat Shaming in a Neoliberal Era; Performativity, Healthism and the Uk's 'obesity epidemic'", Spratt (2023) discusses how fat shaming operates as a tool to demoralize and segregate 'bad citizens' from 'good citizens'. Spratt writes,

> The 'ideal neoliberal citizen' often feels pressured to regulate their weight in

> order to minimize any 'burden' that they might pose to their local and or national systems (Brown et al 2013)...people living with overweight and obesity are viewed not only as self-destructive and gluttonous but also selfish for seemingly prioritizing themselves and their pleasures above others who are dealing with conditions that they did not cause (Geenhalgh, 2015).

Therefore, the appearance of fatness is a marker of personal attributes both moral and biomedical. With such subversive anti-fat bias in the most basic of social systems, stereotyping of fat bodies is rampant and leaves fat individuals inherently disadvantaged and vulnerable to discrimination and mistreatment. However, the perpetrators of anti-fat bias and discriminatory practices are not kept accountable. If anything, fat-people continue to face a stigma that purports stronger will to become not-fat would benefit the individual biomedically and hardship or discrimination would cease.

This chapter will provide an overview of fat discrimination case law to understand how fat discrimination is treated as a matter of identity within the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It is within this parameter that we will argue that fat-discrimination is once again, inconsistently understood and treated as a means of serving the nation state in boundary making. This chapter will conclude that the nation relies on fatness as a misunderstood political identity; analogous to disability. We will trace these historical processes that have culminated in punitive structures such as biopower (Foucault, 1978) to exist in the educational ecosystem.

Fat Discrimination Case Law in Canada

Fat-discrimination has been approached inconsistently in the Canadian legal landscape largely due to an inconsistent definition and political position of disability and whether fatness is defined or accepted as an analogous ground of disability or not. This lack of consistency, leaves those facing discrimination due to fatness left to prove unjust treatment, advocate for inclusion and defend themselves against discrimination and unfair treatment. To consolidate how fatness should be unilaterally defined as a disability, we will look at case-law that cites fat-discrimination. The cases *Ontario vs. Vogue Shoes (1991)* and *Saskatchewan (Human Rights Commission) vs. St. Paul Lutheran Home of Melville (1993)* struggle to define fatness as a disability and are ultimately unsuccessful in proving discrimination. *Hamlyn v. Cominco Ltd (1989), Rogal v. Daglish (2000)* and *Linda McKay v. Air Canada (2006)* distinctly define fatness as a (perceived) disability and are ultimately successful in their claim. Let's explore how each of these cases defines fatness as it relates to the claim of discrimination.

In *Ontario Human Rights Commission (on behalf of Carolyn Maddox) v. Vogue Shoes (1991)*, Carolyn Maddox was told by her employer that her employment was at risk if she did not lose thirty-five pounds. Mrs. Maddox filed a human rights complaint alleging discrimination of a physical disability and sex. Ultimately, Mrs. Maddox's claim was dismissed. The case is fraught with differing opinions on whether fatness can be considered a disability or handicap and if the nature of Mrs. Maddox's fatness was due to illness or beyond the scope of her own intervention, such as weight loss. Judgement concluded;

> …obesity does not in itself amount to a physical disability within s. 9(1)(b)(i) of the *Code* unless it is an ongoing condition, effectively beyond the individual's control, which limits or is perceived to limit his or her physical capabilities. On the facts of this case, there is evidence that Mrs. Maddox's obesity was an ongoing condition, but it was not established that the condition limited or was perceived by the respondents as limiting her physical capabilities. (para. 70)

Interestingly, the position of the board was that Mrs. Maddox's fatness was a mutable characteristic and well within her control. The board cited *Jefferson v. Baldwin and BC Ferries Services (1976), "*Physical Disability has a characteristic one finds in a number of other protected categories such as race, color, age and sex, namely that the person can do nothing of his own volition to remove himself or herself from the category".

Unfortunately for Mrs. Maddox, fat-stigma permeates their claim of discrimination as the board identifies that fatness is a personal choice and should Mrs. Maddox wanted to lose 35 pounds, it was well within her means to do so. Whether Mrs. Maddox wanted to lose weight or not is irrelevant but nonetheless used against her, "At her examination for discovery, Mrs. Maddox testified that she had never sought advice about a program of weight reduction from Dr. Ralph or any other physician [Exhibit 7, p. 20]" (para.95). The failure of this case rests in the liminality of fatness and whether fatness, if not the consequence of other medical conditions, can alone be considered a disability.

Saskatchewan (Human Rights Commission) v. St. Paul Lutheran Home of Melville (1993) argued that Ms. Davidson was denied employment due to fat discrimination. The

definition of disability applied according to the Saskatchewan Human Rights Code, requires proof of cause by bodily injury, birth defect or illness and the board found insufficient evidence that obesity could be classified as an illness. The boards response was as follows,

> The evidence only shows that her obesity results from unspecified causes. In the view of this Board the fact that her condition may be caused by illness is not sufficiently strong to lead to the conclusion that it is more probable than not that her obesity is caused by illness. This Board regards the probabilities as equal and, as a result, the burden [of proof] has not been discharged (para. 4).

It is important to note that the burden of proof laid on fat individuals who have been discriminated against for their size is in itself an extension of fat-bias and discrimination. Fatness must be considered an unwanted consequence of "bodily injury, birth defect or illness" and beyond the person's control. Only then is a person's vulnerability to being discriminated against established. Otherwise, if fatness cannot be attributed to an external factor, the fatness in question is regarded as a personal failure, well within the realm of a person's control and outside the scope of discrimination.

Legally, fatness as a status of disability remains open to interpretation despite advancement in bariatric medicine and greater understanding that fatness itself is a multifaceted *disease.* According to the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, obesity is classified as a disease;

> Obesity is a complex disease that occurs when an individual's weight is higher than what is considered healthy for his or her height. Obesity affects children as

> well as adults. Many factors can contribute to excess weight gain including eating patterns, physical activity levels and sleep routines. Social determinants of health, genetics and taking certain medications also play a role. (*Causes of Obesity | Overweight & Obesity*, 2022)

If Ms. Davidson's fatness had been framed as a disease itself and therefore an illness, the singular defining cause of her obesity would have been moot. The inclusion of social determinants of health in the Centre for Disease Control's definition of obesity is significant in understanding the complexity of fatness in divorcing a person's health status from moral failure or personal competence. The social determinants of health allow us to examine health as an issue of race, class, gender and access. A person's ability to access food, healthcare, education, and job security, among other factors, impact their health directly and indirectly which, in a case of discrimination, should not be held against the person citing unfair treatment or exclusion.

In contrast to the aforementioned unsuccessful discrimination cases, *Hamlyn v. Cominco (1989), Rogal v. Daglish (2000)* and *Linda McKay-Panos v. Air Canada (2006)* define fatness as an analogous ground to disability and each case establishes discrimination against a person due to body size. In the case of *Hamlyn v. Cominco (1989)*, Hamlyn's employment contract was not renewed citing a perceived weight gain. Hamlyn's weight was perceived as a factor that would limit Hamlyn's ability to work and fulfill his job duties. Therefore, it was a perceived disability and he was ultimately discriminated against, "Cominco saw Hamlyn as physically unable to do the job because of his weight. Counsel contended that obesity is a disability, even if it is treatable, and

that an obese person who is able to do the job should be protected from discrimination"(para. 10). Hamlyn was not asked by his employer to lose weight. He was refused a contract because of his perceived weight gain. The perception of both the weight gained and the interference that would have on his ability to do his job, that he has successfully done for a number of years, exemplifies the discrimination faced by fat people in the workplace. Fat people are often thought of as liabilities or lacking personal competence to prevent more weight gain. The Council cites *Biggs v. Hudson (1988)* to distinguish how discrimination based on perceived disability operates as discrimination regardless of the disability status of the person, rendering them vulnerable to power structures such as an employer-employee relationship. *Hamlyn v. Cominco (1989)* is important in establishing that fat people are vulnerable to the judgment and exclusion of participation by non-fat people in power. Hamlyn's fatness is successfully considered an analogous ground of disability, further establishing fatness as an embodied experience in need of Human Rights protection.

A similar circumstance found in *Rogal v. Daglish (2000)*, Rogal was dismissed from a job operating carnival rides citing his size and the fact that he could not fit into the employee uniform. The similarity to *Hamlyn v. Cominco's case* is that the discrimination takes place in the assumption that the person's embodiment limits their ability, followed by exclusion from the employer due to the perceived limitation. The Deputy Chief Commissioner of the British Columbia Human Rights Commission explores if obesity is a disability within the meaning of the Code. The Deputy Chief Commissioner submitted;

> Obesity should be considered both a "disability" and a "perceived disability" within the meaning of the *Code.* The DCC contended that refusing to employ an obese person because of a negative stereotypical attitude is no less abhorrent than the refusal to employ a person because of sex, race or sexual orientation…obesity should be covered as a form of disability or perceived disability because of the pervasive, debilitating treatment that obese people are subjected to in our society (para. 20).

This submission, while an important advancement for fat people in terms of acknowledgement of social exclusion and oppression, does not use a medical definition of obesity and has the potential to conflate disability with a characteristic deemed negative. For this reason, among others, the submissions by the Deputy Chief Commissioner were not considered by the Council. *Rogal v. Daglish (2000)* makes an interesting case for fat-discrimination faced more broadly but is ultimately successful on the grounds that Rogal's size is a perceived disability like that of Hamlyn.

The last Canadian case of fat-discrimination that we will examine is *Linda McKay-Panos v. Air Canada (F.C.A) (2006)* as the discrimination she faced as a fat traveler falls under federal jurisdiction. This case depicts the unfair and unjust treatment of Ms.McKay-Panos, citing undue obstacles to the mobility of the person, loss of dignity and humiliation when she did not fit in a standard Air Canada seat. It was suggested by Air Canada that Ms. McKay-Panos purchase a business class ticket to accommodate her size, given that business class seats are larger. Considering that this case was appealed to the Federal Court of Appeal, Ms. McKay-Panos' fatness was previously established,

citing Stein-Leventhal syndrome as a medically contributing factor to her obesity and her status of obesity has not been argued against. It is how her fatness was treated by Air Canada employees and whether or not Air Canada failed to accommodate Ms. McKay-Panos, should her obesity be considered a disability. Much of this case therefore, rests on the interpretation and application of the *Canada Transportation Act (1996)*. Ms. McKay-Panos' claim questions section 5(d) "the transportation system is accessible without undue obstacle to the mobility of all persons, including persons with disabilities".[1] The intricate nature of this case is in establishing that Ms. McKay-Panos was a person with a disability that was not accommodated, rather than citing the seat as the undue obstacle;

> In light of the concession that the appellant suffers from an impairment and the fact that she encountered an activity limitation on account of this impairment, the only conclusion open to the Agency was that the appellant is a person with a disability under the CTA (para. 42).

Ms. McKay-Panos' claim is only successful because her obesity is situated in the Medical Model and recognizes that her fatness is not only related to an illness as she previously disclosed, but limits her participation and inclusion and therefore requires accommodation, which Air Canada failed to provide. The success of Ms. McKay-Panos' claim is also in recognizing the economic burden placed on disabled individuals, when that responsibility should be placed on the transportation service itself. This case

[1] Canada Transportation Act has since been changed, in 2007 now citing 5(d) the transportation system is accessible without undue obstacle to the mobility of all persons; and 5(d.1) the transportation system is accessible without barriers to persons with disabilities; and

demonstrates that the Social Model of disability, identifying the seat at the undue obstacle, fails fat people in their pursuit of identifying discrimination. When fatness is presented as a chronic disease, there is opportunity to identify the social and environmental exclusion of larger bodies, and the medical limitations that some fat people experience, such as limited mobility. The Medical Model can justly serve fat Canadians by identifying them as a population in need of protection against discrimination, without inherently fat-shaming or motivating fat people to become thin.

These cases have proven that fatness is inconsistently treated in Canadian courts of law. Ultimately, when established and defined as a disability by the Medical Model, supported by the Centre for Disease Control, fatness should be interpreted as an analogous ground of disability. We can use these cases to identify power imbalances between fat-employees and their employers and how fat-bias operates within court rulings in the cultural belief that excess weight can be remediated according to a persons' will. Understanding that fatness is a complex status of embodiment, we would be remiss to ignore how deep anti-fat sentiments lie within society including the failure to acknowledge fatness as an enumerated or analogous ground to disability by the Canadian Human Rights Code.

Fatness as an Analogous Ground of Discrimination

Section 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms lists enumerated grounds that a person is protected by, on the basis of discrimination. This includes race, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability. Courts allow for analogous grounds to be named and protected when citing discrimination. An

analogous ground is defined as "analogous grounds describe personal characteristics that are either immutable (characteristics that people cannot change) or constructively immutable (characteristics that are changeable only at unacceptable cost to personal identity). Once a ground has been found to be analogous, it will always be a ground in the future" (*Charterpedia - Section 15 – Equality Rights*, 2022). Examples of analogous grounds include non-citizenship, marital status, sexual orientation and Aboriginality-residence. While people may be able to participate in weight-loss programs, restrictive diets, exercise regimes or medical procedures such as gastric bypass, the degree of weight-loss one may experience is not guaranteed nor is it free from any of the other social determinants of health.

For example, a persons' ability to adhere to a supervised weight-loss program that is based on calorie restriction such as Weight Watchers relies on the person's economic status to be able to participate. A person must be able to afford the cost of monthly membership fees, transportation required to attend meetings, time committed to attending the meeting, purchasing suggested food and preparing it. It does not ensure weight-loss and it does not guarantee that during the program a fat person will not be discriminated against. Mrs. Maddox testified that she never consulted medical advice for weight loss and that within her discrimination claim, her ability to lose 35 pounds was considered within her control. Mrs. Maddox and Mr. Hamlyn were both scrutinized for their failure to engage in weight loss programs, which served as a distraction from the respective claims of discrimination. Insisting that fatness is a mutable characteristic ignores the nuanced medical understanding of obesity as a chronic disease influenced by a number of

uncontrollable factors such as genetics and social determinants of health. The ability to comply with weight-reduction programs or interventions does not prevent discrimination during that process, nor does it assure a person will lose weight.

The legal understanding of fatness remains confused. Considered an immutable characteristic by way of medical definitions and diagnoses, but contested by others.. The undue hardship faced by fat people is scrutinized by the very same bias that bore legal remedy to discriminatory practices. A common thread found among all Canadian Fat-discrimination precedent is the applicant's willingness or interest in becoming non-fat. There is a political component to how applicants presented as compliance or not and therefore demonstrates that the appearance of fatness, regardless of how the fatness was acquired, is not at all about fatness but about corporeal conformity.

The History of Fat Discrimination : The creation of Race and Boundaries

It is purposeful that the Canadian legal system and education system rely on inconsistency as a way to blur understanding, accountability and prevent activist organizing. If fatness was an enumerated ground of discrimination and did not rely on being considered a disability, the Medical Model of fatness would be obsolete and there could be a unilateral understanding that a person's fatness or perceived fatness is used as a political tool against them.

In "Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics and Black Feminist Theories of the Human ", Weheliye (2014) dissects the creation of race as a process of sociopolitical discipline. Their writing explores the body both as an individual location but also as part of 'assemblages'. In Chapter 5: Law & Property, Weheliye (2014) writes,

> We are in dire need of alternatives to the legal conception of personhood that dominates our world and, in addition, to not lose sight of what remains outside the law, what the law cannot capture, what it cannot magically transform into the fantastic form of property ownership (p.81)

It is the vulnerability of personhood that Weheliye contemplates; who defines personhood, who abides by said definition of personhood, who has access to legal personhood and who benefits from the exclusionary boundaries in creating categories of non-persons. Strings (2019) provides a historical context to said boundary making,

> In the mid-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in the context of the Englightenment and the peak of the slave trade, the science of race-making took flight. Then as at its inception, philosophers underscored the purported racial distinctions in facial features, body type and attractiveness... (p. 81)

There is no divorcing anti-fat bias and fat-phobia from its origins of white supremacy and colonial power. These sentiments, thought to have long been politically abolished through political 'achievements' such as section 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, have merely transfigured into alternative forms of oppression that operate covertly and invisibly in an effort to maintain a hierarchy of white bodies.

We must consider the enumerated grounds of discrimination found in section 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms to be as Weheliye (2014) describes; 'a legal conception of personhood'. Analogous grounds of discrimination provide the illusion that non-enumerated grounds of discrimination such as fatness, are considered equally as unjust. Given the legal precedent around fat-discrimination case law in

Canada, fat people are not protected from weight-based discrimination regardless of the successful pursuit of analogous grounds and the theory of protection. Successful cases rely on the understanding that fatness is immutable due to disability and establishing that the state of fatness is not self-inflicted. Should fatness be considered anything less than a symptom or consequence of other medical conditions, we find ourselves thrust back into the binary of embodiment; fatness as a marker of race and failure to achieve personhood.

In Chapter 3: Assemblages & Articulation, Weheliye (2014) quotes Dorothy Roberts, "Race is not a biological category that is politically charged. It is a political category that has been disguised as a biological one" (p.51). In the book "Fearing the Black Body: Racial Origins of Fat Phobia", Sabrina Strings (2019) states,

> ... two critical historical developments contributed to a fetish for svelteness and a phobia about fatness: the rise of the transatlantic slave trade and the spread of Prtestantism. Racial scientific rhetoric about slavery linked fatness to "greedy" Africans. And religious discourse suggested that overeating was ungodly. (p.13)

The characteristic of fatness is used as a racial marker to categorize bodies with different political implications for white-fat bodies and racialized fat bodies (Strings, 2019) . White-fat bodies are punished into conforming to the neoliberal ideal white producer through cultural weight-stigma that normalizes individualist ownership of excessive weight due to immoral or unintelligent choice. It is when the white-fat body has returned to its intended form that personhood can be restored (Harjunen, 2021). Racialized fat bodies are discarded and exemplified that the racialized body is not fit for personhood (Strings, 2019).

This Major Research Paper remains concerned with practices that take place in Canadian Physical Education spaces, however the current and long-standing practices cannot be divorced from political influence which largely shape attitudinal norms of discrimination against fat children. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is but one political artifact that allows us to understand the operation of fatness as a tool of neoliberal ideals and biopower. With a framework that establishes anti-fat bias and discrimination as a tool used to punish, conform or discard bodies, we can now approach and analyze Canadian educational documents such as curriculum. The basis of this research is in an effort to trace how legal personhood is not ubiquitous but earned should a body prove willing to submit to national colonial sentiments and neoliberal rhetoric of the "good citizen", acknowledging 'the school' as a location for the deployment of such ideologies and corporeal surveillance and control.

Chapter 3: Open Coding of Fat-Bias in Canadian Provincial Grade 9 Physical Education Curriculum

I completed my Bachelors of Education degree at York University and one of the required courses was 'Physical Education in the Primary Junior Divisions'. To say that I was terrified of this class was an understatement. Not only did I dread the potential of being a Physical Education teacher myself, but to subject myself to Physical Education as an adult? No thank you, I may be in higher education but I'm not a masochist. Like the good student that I am, I complied.

The time came to enroll and the pursuit of my B.Ed outweighed my fears. Lindsay LaMorre was seconded to the faculty of education and my instructor for the course. Her Physical Education pedagogy was unlike any physical educator I had ever met. She sought out opportunities to engage in movement, embodiment and expression. She taught us about physical safety, the joy of physical curiosity and how to play. This is what Physical Education could be but more importantly, this was the Physical re-Education that I needed. It was during a dance class that we were encouraged to close our eyes and take up space, to move to the music and engage with emotions. At first I kept one eye open and watched as my peers sunk into their bodies. I closed my eyes and as if hit by a gentle breeze I realized I could belong here, in my body.

Introduction

This Major Research Paper will conclude with an open coding of educational policy to explore anti-fat and citizenship rhetoric within the Canadian Physical Education curriculum. The basis of this investigation asserts that curriculum expectations work as a governing body and as an extension of Provincial and Federal belief regarding the function of education and the content that students are expected to learn. Building on the scoping review in Chapter 1 which acknowledges the existence of fat-bias in Physical Education classes, and the historical and political implications of fatness as a marker of class and race in a neoliberal context explored in Chapter 2, it is still unclear how common discriminatory practices and biased thought are reproduced in classrooms in the twenty-first century. It is the belief of this Major Research Paper that curriculum documents can provide an opportunity to understand how the relationship between the linguistic bias of curriculum and the authoritative structure of education produce opportunities for oppression to thrive and normalize overtime.

I contend that Canadian provincial Physical Education curriculum documents present teachers with linguistic bias against fat students; conflating fatness or lack of fitness with poor citizenship. This open coding project will demonstrate how language regarding fitness and health is used in deception to maintain nation-building ideologies that trace back to neoliberal ideologies and colonial power structures of White supremacy. Lastly, this project will also document how limited the curriculum is in addressing the social determinants of health in an effort to propagate a narrative that health status is individually mutable and most directly influenced by Physical Education curriculum expectations.

Methodology and Limitations

This open coded research project will investigate the grade 9 Canadian Provincial Physical Education curriculum. The provincial curriculum documents are available to the public and published through provincial websites and were accessed as such. All of the curriculum accessed and analyzed is created by the Provincial government as there is no Federal regulating body;

> Canada is a federation of 10 provinces and three territories. Under the Canadian Constitution, provincial governments have exclusive responsibility for all levels of education. There is no ministry or department of education at the federal level. Canada's three territories — Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut — do not have the same constitutional status as the provinces and are subject, in many areas, to more direct control by the federal government. (*Ministries/departments responsible for education in Canada,* 2023)

Considering that the Canadian territories do not have the same constitutional status it is pertinent that this major research paper limits its focus to only on the 10 Canadian provinces to prevent diluting the important research regarding Canadian territories, national identity, health and education. It would be remiss of this project to include the Canadian territories when such research requires a more thorough and expansive exploration of health and citizenship in the context of Canadian territories, given the difference in constitutional status.

Secondly, this project will only focus on the grade 9 curriculum. Each province requires different compulsory credits to be completed towards a secondary school

diploma. However, all 10 provinces require the completion (or exemption) of grade 9 Physical Education to graduate, which is why it will be used as the basis for open coding and linguistic bias analysis. It should be noted here that the Quebec Physical Education guideline is not delineated by grade, therefore the entire Quebec 'Secondary Physical Education & Health: Progression of Learning' (Quebec, 2010) was considered for this coding project.

The publication dates of each of the provincial curriculum documents provides a considerable insight to the influences on curriculum including but not limited to provincial politics, federal politics and popular culture. Table 1. lists each of the provinces and the date the current Physical Education curriculum was published, which spans 23 years; 2000 to 2023. Acknowledging the publication dates of each of the curriculum documents, and the variation in timeline gives nuance to the data collected as we can extrapolate greater context for the time at which the curriculum was written.

For example, in 2000 Canada's Prime Minister was Jean Chretien, Alberta's Provincial Premier was Progressive Conservative Ralph Phillip Klein and Alberta's Minister of Education was Progressive Conservative Lyle Oberg. None of these politicians remain in their respective positions yet the political dynamic of the provincial government's influence on the creation and publication of education documents, such as Alberta's Physical Education curriculum does. Therefore, curriculum documents, although active, seem to be irrespective of time despite a multitude of factors that may influence pedagogical practices and what constitutes equitable curriculum content as we understand curriculum documents to be a political artifact. Comparing documents that

have been written at different times with different external influences could pose a challenge, however given that each of the curriculum documents being examined and analyzed are in current use allows for equitable comparison of language and motive.

Table 1.

Alberta	2000	Nova Scotia	2014
British Columbia	2016	Ontario	2015
Manitoba	2000	Prince Edward Island	2023
New Brunswick	2007	Quebec	2010
Newfoundland & Labrador	2011	Saskatchewan	2009

The open coding process will explore the context of language related to fatness; specifically terms such as but not limited to 'obesity', 'overweight', 'sedentary' to determine the presence of anti-fat sentiments and neoliberal ideologies of fitness as citizenship exist within the Canadian provincial Physical Education curriculum. This investigation will include the recording and analysis of narrative teacher-prompts, teacher-student dialogue or secondary sources embedded in curriculum that reinforce stereotyping of fat-bodies. Thirdly, language that relates to the opposite of fatness; terms such as 'fitness' or 'healthy' in the context of citizenship will also be noted and analyzed. Lastly, we will record the inclusion or lackthereof the (social) determinants of health to help further contextualize curriculum expectations and claims.

Results

The Canadian Provincial Physical Education curriculum for grade 9 Physical Education is littered with linguistic bias against fat-students. While some provinces address weight and body composition as natural human variance, other provinces problematize excess weight and are determined to utilize curriculum expectations as a vehicle to address 'childhood obesity'. This paper will discuss the results of the research by highlighting and categorizing the data found into three themes; anti-fat rhetoric, neoliberal ideologies and social determinants of health.

Anti-fat Rhetoric in Curriculum

Manitoba's *Physical Education & Health Education* (2000) and Nova Scotia's *Physical Education* (2014) both position curriculum documents as opportunities to address childhood obesity. While neither curriculum documents claim to prevent or cure childhood obesity, the vilification of obesity creates a binary system for coding bodies; fit or fat, sedentary or active. The Nova Scotia (2014) 'aim' of the Physical Education curriculum reads,

> Current obesity and physical inactivity rates are at an all-time high in Nova Scotia (Thompson and Wadsworth, 2012). Quality physical education is a place where all Nova Scotia children can grow as physically literate individuals. In order for students to become physically literate, they must participate in a quality physical education program. p.7

Linguistically, 'physical inactivity' and 'obesity' are constructed as causational; a primary example of fat-bias and stereotyping that fat people are inactive and sedentary. Nova Scotia's goal of physical literacy is therefore inherently biased in its promotion of

'non-sedentary' activity in the understanding that 'sedentary' is coded language to describe fat and inactive students. Manitoba's (2000) curriculum overview provides a similar binary description using the term 'sedentary' coded for fatness;

> In today's society, an entire generation of children is provided with increased opportunities to live completely sedentary lifestyles with reduced social interactivity…Furthermore, physical inactivity has an impact on development of movement skills, fitness management, personal-social well-being and associated health problems. p.5

The use of hyperbole in 'completely sedentary lifestyles' only invigorates a binary understanding of a multitude of factors that contribute to body composition and lifestyle choices. The Manitoba (2000) curriculum frames 'physical inactivity' as a risk to fitness management and the cause of health problems. Without supportive data or intersectional consideration, the Manitoba curriculum asserts that there are consequences to a 'sedentary' (fat) lifestyle and is therefore biased in its framework without having approached curriculum expectations or teaching guidelines.

We can extrapolate that the terms 'active' and 'sedentary' are used to maintain a binary between non fat-bodies and fat bodies. The use of the term 'lifestyle' operates to acknowledge the illusion of choice; the choice to be active versus the choice to be sedentary. This further poses moral judgment on what presents as choice, but is really a confluence of external factors.

The data collected shows (Appendix 1.) that references to weight are inconsistent and written with the basic understanding that excess weight is caused by poor food

choices and inactivity. There is a particular focus on 'personal fitness management', which is a distinction from evaluating choice. Across Alberta (2000), Manitoba (2000), Newfoundland & Labrador (2011), Ontario (2015) and Saskatchewan (2009) curriculum documents require students to create fitness or meal plans for themselves, and the student's adherence may be used for evaluation. The linguistic bias found in the curricular expectations around compliance or adherence to a fitness/ meal plan solidifies the anti-fat understanding that bodies are to be managed, controlled or maintained in fear of becoming unmanageable, uncontrolled or neglected.

The Alberta (2000) *Fitness Program Analysis* enumerates 'weight-loss' as a suggested personal goal for students. Manitoba (2000) references 'physical inactivity' and 'unhealthy dietary behaviors' as the first two components related to the cause of major health issues (p.149). It also denotes, "Physical education/ health education must help each student develop a pattern of daily and/or regular participation in physical activities, and develop and maintain an understanding of how to acquire/maintain optimal personal health and fitness." (p 59). Newfoundland & Labrador (2011) curriculum establishes that 'good' practices can improve quality of life, "Students are able to identify and analyze the importance of good nutritional practices and physical activity on development and improved quality of life" (p.47). The Ontario Physical Education Curriculum (2015) narrates a teacher-student discussion with a vague understanding of how a 'healthy eating plan' can help a student 'avoid illness',

> Teacher prompt: "How can a healthy eating plan help you?"
>
> Student: "A healthy eating plan will help me get the right amount of energy and nutrients

> and make my body's systems work better. A plan could also put me on the right track for avoiding serious illnesses later in life." p.104.

The Saskatchewan (2009) Physical Education curriculum states, "In Grade 9 Physical Education, students will determine safe and credible publicly promoted options for managing body composition [and] weight (i.e., decrease body fat, increase muscle content)" (p.28). This subtly that decreasing body fat is the assumed promoted option for managing the body, is another example of nuanced anti-fat rhetoric that is found within the curriculum documents.

A considerable amount of the anti-fat rhetoric found within Canadian Physical Health Education documents is presented as narrated teacher prompts or suggested outside of specific teaching expectations (Appendix 1, column 5). When teachers are given vague discussion suggestions such as "discuss controllable and non-controllable risk factors, e.g diabetes, cardio-vascular disease, osteoporosis, obesity, cancer" (p.16) as found in the New Brunswick Physical Education (2007) curriculum, they are free to interpret this with preconceived notions of health, fat-bias and what is an equitable discussion around controlling risk factors and their students are at risk of misinformation and discriminatory bias.

Some of the narrative bias found within curriculum documents encourages binary thinking of fitness versus fatness, health versus illness with the expectation that the collective desire is to avoid fatness and illness. An example includes a journal prompt in the Saskatchewan (2009) curriculum, "Express insights in response to questions such as "What is your plan for remaining active for the rest of your life?"... and "How might your level of

fitness affect your preferred future?" (p.27). The fat-bias here encourages students to assume that a lack of fitness and lack of body management may result in unwanted illness or disease.

New Brunswick (2007) and Ontario (2015) promote the use of Body Mass Index as a tool to calculate and assess health status, although the New Brunswick document encourages teachers to deal with BMI and waist-hip measurements 'sensitively' (p.16). Alberta (2000) claims that "people of all ages can substantially improve their health and quality of life by including a moderate amount of physical activity into their daily lives".

In contrast, British Columbia (2016) and Prince Edward Island (2023) do not address weight or body management in a manner that is inherently fat-phobic, nor do either of the documents present Physical Education as a way to address childhood obesity. Therefore, weight and body composition can be successfully addressed without giving opportunity for oppressively fat-phobic and anti-fat beliefs to target fat students, using curriculum as support.

Fitness as Citizenship

Language regarding individualism and citizenship were found in all 10 provincial curriculum documents. Each province promotes the individual pursuit of lifelong healthy active living, including but not limited to the examples provided in Table 2.;

Table 2.

Alberta	● Schools and teachers can be facilitators in providing opportunities for the development and desire for 'lifelong' participation in physical activity. ● Students will assume responsibility to lead an active way of life ● …students to develop a desire to participate for life
British Columbia	● Focus on lifelong safety, physical activity and health ● [students] need to be safe, active and healthy citizens throughout their lives
Manitoba	● Student learning outcomes have been designed to support an integrated and holistic approach to using highly active and interactive learning

	experiences to promote lifelong physical activity and well-being. (p3)
New Brunswick	• …committed to lifelong healthy active living (p.16)
Newfoundland & Labrador	• Personal Development: Graduates will be able to continue to learn and to pursue an active, healthy lifestyle. (p.39)
Nova Scotia	• Students will be expected to demonstrate knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to be active for life. (p.92)
Ontario	• [students will learn] the skills and knowledge that will enable them to enjoy being active and healthy throughout their lives (p.6)
Prince Edward Island	• Active living involves integrating physical activity into daily routines in an enjoyable and sustainable way that can lead to lifelong habits of physical activity (p.21)
Quebec	• It is therefore all the more important that Physical Education and Health teachers offer their students activities that will motivate them to continue or resume being physically active on a daily basis, starting now and for the rest of their lives. (p.50)
Saskatchewan	• Active Living - Enjoy and engage in healthy levels of participation in movement activities to support lifelong active living in the context of self, family, and community. (p.14)

Each province varies on how it defines 'healthy-active living' but all maintain that a priority of the course and curriculum development is to create adults who take personal responsibility to maintain 'active' and 'healthy' lifestyles.

Ontario (2015) and British Columbia (2016) promote the participation in lifelong physical activity as responsible citizenship. British Columbia specifically notes that "both the individual and society benefit when citizens are healthier and happier and make personally and socially responsible choices." (2016, para. 6). The Alberta curriculum (2000) argues "Physical activity can improve health, which reduces the cost of healthcare for individuals and the community" (para 6). While this is the only statement that openly equates physical activity, health and the economics of healthcare as an individual responsibility that

the student should be aware of, sentiments equating personal responsibility for one's health and fitness as demonstration of good citizenship are littered throughout the Physical Education curriculum documents (See Appendix 1.).

(Social) Determinants of Health

Lastly, curriculum documents were read for inclusion or awareness of Social Determinants of Health (SDH). As defined by the World Health Organization (2023), "The SDH have an important influence on health inequities - the unfair and avoidable differences in health status seen within and between countries". Examples of SDH include but are not limited to: income, social protection, education, job insecurity, working life conditions, food insecurity, housing, early childhood development, social inclusion, structural conflict, access to affordable health services of quality.

Ontario (2015) is the only province that addresses Social Determinants of Health in the foreword of the curriculum;

Determinants of Health

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared in the preamble to its constitution, which came into force in 1948, that health is "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity". Today, Health Canada includes the following in its list of "determinants of health" (that is, factors and conditions that can have a significant influence on a person's health): income and social status, social support networks, education and literacy, employment and working conditions, physical and social environments, biology and genetic endowment, personal Health and Physical Education health practices and coping skills, healthy child

development, availability and quality of health services, gender, culture, and other factors. Other recent models describe and group the factors differently and include additional factors, such as stress, food insecurity, care in early life, and Aboriginal status. Together, such factors affect an individual's overall state of physical, mental, social, emotional, and spiritual well-being. They influence not only whether a person stays healthy or becomes ill but also the extent to which the person possesses the physical, social, and personal resources needed to identify and achieve personal aspirations, satisfy needs, and cope with the environment. These factors also have an impact on student learning as a whole, and are strongly connected to learning in health and physical education. Although students have varying degrees of control over these factors, it is important to be aware of them as contributing factors in student performance. It is also important to recognize the value of personal strategies that can be learned and practiced to foster well-being in the face of stressful and challenging life circumstances. (p. 11-12).

The process of reading for inclusion of Social Determinants of Health was not restricted to the World Health Organization definition, but open to broader acknowledgement that health status is impacted by more than individual choice and willingness to participate in physical activity.

Discussion

The data collected has demonstrated the presence of anti-fat rhetoric, fitness as citizenship ideologies and minimal inclusion of the Social Determinants of Health across 10 Canadian provincial Health and Physical Education curriculum documents for grade 9 students. In this section, we will discuss the greater nuances of the data collected, which

can be referred back to via Appendix 1. This research initiative was primarily interested in how anti-fat rhetoric appears in Canadian provincial curriculum documents. While instances of fat bias are prevalent in some of the material, what is more significant is the consistent codifying of bodies into binary systems, which utilize fatness as a marker of a 'bad' body . We can therefore understand that the fat-phobic and anti-fat rhetoric is an extension of neoliberal constructions of the body as productive and a location for bio-political nationalism to thrive.

The investigation into anti-fat sentiments in curriculum documents led this research into understanding fatness and anti-fat attitudes exist at the intersectionality of race, citizenship and power. Some of the language used within the curriculum can be read as anti-fat although masked as 'fitness as citizenship' rhetoric. In establishing fatness as an embodiment or body composition that is unwanted, preventable or in need of intervention, curriculum documents assert that all bodies, regardless of variation in presentation, do not hold the same intrinsic value. This paper argues that understanding 'fitness as citizenship' determines an embodiment read or perceived as 'unfit' must either conform to the ideal embodiment or is considered not worthy of citizenship.

Curriculum guidelines establish 'good citizenship' as a person who takes personal responsibility for their health and maintains daily fitness routines. Learning that good citizenship requires personal responsibility of one's health not only discriminates against those with complex and nuanced health conditions, including but not limited to varying degrees of influence of social determinants of health, but maintains an implied inverse; that 'unhealthy' people are poor citizens that do not take responsibility for their health.

Ultimately, the Physical Education curriculum serves as an example of subjugation and discipline of the body by a government entity and therefore a location of Foucault's (1990) concept of biopower. I assert the obfuscation of body composition as a marker of citizenship is purposeful by way of curriculum for the use of disciplinary biopower to achieve the ideal citizen. As summarized by Taylor (2011);

> Biopower is able to access the body because it functions through norms rather than laws, because it is internalized by subjects rather than exercised from above through acts or threats of violence, and because it is dispersed throughout society rather than located in a single individual or government body. (p.44).

The presence of anti-fat attitudes in Physical Education were established in Chapter 1. of this Major Research Paper, which demonstrates how fat discrimination operates as a norm rather than law. In Chapter 2, the lack of legal protection against fat discrimination allows for the internalization of fatness as a personal failure meriting environmental and social limitations. Lastly we understand that anti-fat bias and 'fitness as citizenship' rhetoric is carried through an unsystematic presentation of provincial curriculum documents and therefore dispersed throughout society, left untied to a federal authority.

There is academic precedent that explores Foucaudian power dynamics within the education system. Ivor Goodson and Ian Dowbiggin (1990) write

> The power-knowledge relation crucially relates to the form that the school curriculum espouses and embodies, because as well as servicing to carry content to pupils, the school subject also serves many other constituencies- notably the state and the professional groups involved in schooling…in analyzing the rhetoric

> employed in the promotion of school subjects we gain insight into the agendas of schooling. (p.116-117)

In analyzing Canadian provincial Physical Education curriculum, we have gained said 'agendas of schooling' including but not limited to nation building.

To adequately address how the Canadian provincial Physical Education curriculum works to create and maintain a nation state defined by neoliberal and colonial ideals, we must accept that the 'fitness as citizenship' rhetoric is historically driven by racial discrimination through colonial practices of boundary making around personhood (Strings, 2019). As described by Goodson and Dowbiggin (1990)

> 'Power produces knowledge' as Foucault (1979) has written in *Discipline and Punish* and knowledge, in the service of the modern nation state with it various interest groups and power brokers produces fields or 'disciplines' whose authorities exercise an increasingly thorough and meticulous control over the body (p.105-106).

Curriculum documents are indeed 'in the service of the modern nation state', which works to meticulously control which bodies are to be considered adequate enough for citizenship. Majority of the provinces fail to include any understanding of social determinants of health, which serves to preserve two ideologies; 1) health status is a mutable characteristic and does not warrant protection and 2) the nation state should not be held responsible for the inequities that befall an individual as the 'good citizen' would optimally prevent or avoid hardship through work ethic.

This open coding research project illustrated that the Canadian provincial Physical Education curriculum is a location of biopower where adolescent bodies are codified based on their potential value as Canadian citizens, using anti-fat bias and 'fitness as citizenship' rhetoric to embed systems of discipline and power. Each of the 10 provinces uniquely establishes that a commitment to 'healthy active living' is an attribute of responsible Canadian citizens, which not only lowers the economic cost of healthcare (Alberta, 2000, para 6) but makes citizens 'happier' (British Columbia, 2016, para. 6) while preventing unwanted disease or illness). Thus, affirming a boundary of nation building which is to establish which bodies are worthy of citizenship, which bodies may earn citizenship through discipline and which bodies were never intended for citizenship.

Epilogue: Concluding Thoughts and Questions for Future Research

I have had the unique experience of multiple bodies; megafat, obese, post-bariatric surgery, pregnant, postpartum, fat again, less fat, pregnant again. It ceases to amaze me what my body can do and has done. Not just in growing another human, my bodies have done so much in the face of oppression, exhaustion, in the agony of slow hot summers and in the overwhelm of a newborn fastened to my chest. How my body has carried me, even in times of near emotional sedation, deserves the awe and praise that alluded me in childhood. Researching anti-fat bias in Physical Education has become a love letter to my twelve year old body that so yearned for reassurance that I was good enough. So, perhaps this academic pursuit is best ended in acknowledging that there is no end in the pursuit of embodiment.

What an adventure the future is sure to be.

Fat embodiment remains tenderly at odds with North American popular culture today. There has been great development by fat activists who have worked not only to reclaim the term 'fat', but have also interrupted the normalized oppression of fat people, particularly in medical and health care spaces. The term 'fat' can be a self-identified state of being, a political identity or an entryway to healing institutional trauma. However, he 'fat' in all of its iterations and equivalents continue to be used as a weapon of othering and degradation, a tool for humiliation and ascertaining power over others. It is by acknowledging the great chasm between cultural and political advances and the forces of oppression that remain, that reiterates the importance of fat-studies within the academy. Fat-studies requires us to grapple with intersectional questions of embodiment and worthiness, which is how fatness can be situated within the grounds of Critical Disability Studies, but it would be remiss to pigeon-hole it to an encompassing field as we should consider that wherever there are people, there will be fatness.

Driven by professional curiosity, this Major Research Paper led me to engage academically with forces of systemic oppression that I never personally encountered. Rooted in witnessing and empathizing with the vulnerability of my own students, and personal experience of fat-shame, I have come to understand that the institutional barriers to equity have been forged by long standing discriminatory practices that have leached into the normative operating culture of education. There has been great success by York University researchers, particularly Dr. Carl James, to call into question the discrimination faced by Black students in education. His question into streaming practices in Toronto District School Board revealed attitudinal bias that impacted Black

students and class participation, course enrollment and long-term educational trajectory. This research provides us with an example of how discriminatory practices, including stereotyping of students, impacts the quality of education received. The findings in *Towards Race Equity in Education* (2017) conclude that discriminatory practices and behaviors towards racialized students had profound outcomes;

> The strength of stereotypes contributes to the low expectations teachers and school administrators have of Black students, which in turn is played out in educators' recommendations regarding course selections and the support provided to students in terms of their educational pursuits (p. 53).

This research resulted in the gradual destreaming of the Grade 9 and 10 curriculums. This research provides concrete proof that students face discrimination within my local school system. Discrimination that creates a barrier to their long-term education beyond secondary school.

I believe the research done by Dr. Carl James is foundational in better understanding how anti-fat bias operates as an extension of racism in the Toronto District School Board. We have considered that fatness impacts marginalized communities and the active anti-fat bias in schools, whether implicit or explicit, maintains its roots in racist, anti-immigrant and classist sentiments. This Major Research Paper considered a broad, national perspective and it is my belief that specific provincial and school-board based research is needed and should continue in an effort to make schools a more equitable space for students.

A secondary interest is in locating opportunities for emancipatory movement in schools. If we can consider the grade 9 Physical Education course to be required and therefore 'forced' movement, where is there opportunity for students to experience emancipatory movement? Can that experience happen within a Physical Education class? What is the importance of 'recess' and how might 'recess' be reimagined and reintegrated in the secondary school setting?

This Major Research paper has threaded a delicate needle in an effort to establish the vulnerability of fat students in Physical Education classes across Canadian provinces. Beginning with a scoping review of existing anti-fat bias in Physical Education, an exploration of the history of anti-fat oppression and the context of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and lastly, identifying how the provincial curriculum operates, using anti-fat rhetoric, as an extension of biopower in achieving national ideals of citizenship. It is my intention to continue this inquest in further studies, to explore how educators, policy makers and researchers may work towards more equitable curriculum guidelines and expectations, intersectional Physical Education pedagogy that is inclusive of social determinants of health and lastly establishing the need for opportunities of emancipatory movement in educational settings.

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Appendix

See attached files.