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Saudade: Redefining Body Image beyond Colonial Constructs
by

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ABSTRACT

Body image can be tough to talk about. In physical education (PE) classrooms, teachers may feel reluctant to engage in discussions about body image and food due to the colonial mindsets they hold. There needs to be an increase in promoting efforts to help bridge the gap for educators to reject colonial ways of viewing bodies and colonial constructs of what a healthy body is. Schools can emerge as catalysts for change, and educators play an important role in supporting students. However, change can only be done if educators begin to examine and challenge the very systems and perspectives that are built by current body narratives.

While much research focuses on youth perceptions of body image, there is a gap in the perspectives of educators and how their own understanding influences their teaching practices. Since body image is a mandatory outcome in the Alberta PE curriculum, best approaches within the literature need to be examined. A focus on body neutrality and weight neutral approaches is suitable to understanding body image, two concepts that will later be discussed and explored.

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Privilege Acknowledgement

As I embark on the journey of redefining body image beyond colonial constructs, I would like to acknowledge my position within the intersections of various privileged identities. I am a heteronormative, middle class, large sized, able-bodied, neurotypical, and cis-gendered female who has grown up with much privilege.

I would like to humbly acknowledge that I am just touching the surface within this topic. I am not an expert. However, I do believe it is essential to acknowledge that marginalized groups and communities are at the forefront of challenging and reshaping societal norms surrounding body image. Their strength, activism, and lived experiences move conversations about inclusivity and representation to center stage. At the end of this paper, I will be providing resources that illuminate the invaluable work created by queer, trans, fat, black, people of color, and Indigenous folks whose voices need to be heard to truly continue the journey of unlearning and relearning.

Saudade: Redefining Body Image beyond Colonial Constructs

"When we decide that people's bodies are wrong because we don't understand them, we are trying to avoid the discomfort of divesting from an entire body-shame system."

-Sonya Renee Taylor, *The Body is not an apology: The power of radical self-love (p. 18)*

As a student in an Alberta public school, I grew up with the understanding that the media's idea of "healthy" came with feelings of shame, self-doubt, and guilt about my body. Curriculum teaches us that food should be eaten in specific amounts, at specific times, and include lots of vegetables. The media teaches us that we need to be skinny to be seen as healthy, and if not, then we need to embrace fad diets, calorie counting, and restrictive eating habits. When those two worlds of teaching and understanding blend together, we witness the deep and enduring effects of weight stigma on students.

All individuals are born and have lived in a body vessel that includes intricate pieces of their identities. However, one's intersectional privilege and marginalized identities have an impact on the way in which one must learn to view oneself and the bodies of others. As an educator, I have seen the effects of diet culture on my students and the way they view their bodies. If we, as Physical Education (PE) teachers are expected to teach the curriculum, then why did I grow up in a world where this curriculum was never taught? Why were my teachers so eager to play volleyball but remained silent when it came to body image? If we stay silent, then we are not learning. And, if we are not learning, then we are continuing to perpetuate the harmful effects of colonial ways of viewing bodies onto our students. I believe that if we want students to feel good about their bodies, then we need to change the way we look at and speak about food and bodies.

Purpose Statement

Within the province of Alberta, high school students must take and pass (grade of over 50%) physical education (PE) 10 to receive their high school diploma. In the high school Alberta PE curriculum, teachers must cover the following outcomes: "acknowledge and analyze the media and peer influences on body image" and "discuss the effects of performance-enhancing substances on body type and body image as a part of physical activity" (Alberta Education, 2000, p. 21). However, according to Nutter et al. (2022), his study on teachers reported that they may feel "unprepared to teach a health- related curriculum and/or engage in health promoting initiatives" at the high school level (p. 229). Unfortunately, feeling unprepared can influence the ways PE teachers engage and teach the PE curriculum, specifically, outcomes related to body image (B01). With support from the scholarly work that I have read, societal understandings of body image are the outcomes of colonial constructs (Strings, 2019). The history and legacy of slimness continues to be perpetuated in the media, beginning with a pro-thin, anti-fat bias in nineteenth century magazines by white, elite Americans (Strings, 2019). In society today, expectations and comparisons of body size are prevalent in social media and supported by diets, food restrictions, and the newest celebrity body trends (Papageorgiou, Fisher & Cross, 2022, p. 5). The use of social media applications, such as Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat, can contribute to an increase in body image concerns and insecurities as adolescents compare themselves to celebrities (Papageorgiou, Fisher & Cross, 2022). Historical perceptions of beauty revolve around thinness, slenderness, and using food diets to lower body weight (Strings, 2019). To move in a direction of change, we must dismantle these historical understandings and redefine body image (Kite, L., & Kite, L., 2020). Colonial influences have shaped our perceptions of health, wellness, and body ideals (Strings, 2019); we must discover new perspectives to redefine these concepts through a weight-neutral lens. A weight-neutral lens

focuses on improving an individual's relationship with food, building awareness of hunger cues, advocating for removal of stigma faced by individuals in larger bodies, and emphasizes emotional, mental, and physical wellness over a lower weight or body size (Mauldin, May & Clifford, 2022). We need to movie in a direction of dismantling weight biases and focus on the various intersections that make up who we are as individuals (Mauldin, May & Clifford, 2022). Human beings are shaped by the interactions of different intersections, such as race, gender, class, sexuality, age, and religion, which occur within structures of power (Mauldin, May & Clifford, 2022). Our body shape and size does not define who we are; our experiences and intersections do.

Approach

In my analysis of the Alberta Education 10-12 PE Curriculum (2000), I will be critically examining ways in which educators approach outcomes, and how historical, Eurocentric, and white constructs of bodies influence the way we perceive bodies. By understanding the colonial legacies surrounding body image, educators can work towards redefining body image beyond colonial constructs.

For this literature review, I will be using a selection of scholarly work from a diverse range of sociology, education, and psychology authors, including Sabrina Strings, Lindsay and Lexie Kite, Sonya Renee Taylor, and Dalia Kinsey. Sabrina Strings (2019) discusses the racial origins of fat-phobia and its roots in the transatlantic slave trade, connection to anti-blackness, and diet culture. The impact of colonialization on perceptions of bodies is evident and continues to manifest in society through mainstream media and institutions such as schools (Strings, 2019). Sabrina Strings lays the foundation by providing educators with historical background information to inform their practice. Further, Lindsay and Lexie Kite (2020) discuss ways to

view one's body without using weight biases and understand the multiple intersections of one's identity. A prominent author in the field of body image and decolonizing body image is Sonya Renee Taylor (2021), who discusses ways to reject western ideas of viewing bodies and promote celebrating our various intersections of our beings. Understanding colonial constructs can help individuals dismantle their own biases and approach nutrition in a neutral way. Furthermore, Dalia Kinsley (2022) discusses moving towards inclusive educational approaches that reject the colonial ways of viewing bodies, which are frequently through the lenses of the thin, the straight, and the white.

Literature Review

Body Image Defined

The term body image has a wide range of meanings, depending on its use in academics, schools, clinical practice, and the media (Wright & Leahy, 2015). Within the field of weight-centric academics, "a positive body image indicates body satisfaction, and a negative body image indicates body dissatisfaction" (Webb et al., 2015, as cited in So & Kwon, 2023, p. 56). Body dissatisfaction results from distortions, perceptions, and bodily interest in the body image (Cohen et al., 2018, as cited in So & Kwon, 2023). Thomas Cash (2004) perceives body image as having strong psychological underpinnings, where an individual makes subjective judgments of their appearance that may not be the social reality of their appearance. Kennedy et.al., (2019) suggest that body image is linked with an individual's perceived body size and perceived attractiveness; both of which can be influenced by physical education classes. Research on body image is strongly "dominated by psychological scales of body (dis)satisfaction and self-esteem that has and continues to inform how interventions are imagined and enacted" (Wright & Leahy, 2015, p. 1). In a study conducted by Kennedy et.al., (2019), participating in physical education classes

may help reduce negative body image, specifically body size, among adolescents. As cited in Kennedy et al. (2019), negative body image is associated with depression, low self-esteem, steroid use, suicide ideation, excessive dieting, disordered eating, low physical health, and low sexual health. It is essential that educators begin to have conversations around body image to dismantle the colonial ways of viewing bodies and address the intersectional challenges (Kinsley, 2022).

In the PE curriculum, bodies are the focus. As the topic of body image has become prominent within the world of health and physical education classes, it is important to understand the role that schools have in supporting positive body image among youth. Kirk (2002) claims that schools play a role in constructing and composing bodies, and therefore we need to be aware of the subjective hidden messages students may be getting, especially in physical education classes, that may be focused on performance and largely based on societal expectations of physical appearance. O'Dea and Abraham (2001), as cited in Barker et al., (2003), claim that PE teachers may unknowingly do more harm than good when attempting to educate adolescents about bodies, as attitudes towards bodies can be reflected in teaching practices. In addition, Tinning (1985) is cautioning physical education teachers from advocating strong fitness and health standards as they may contribute to a "cult of slenderness," where societal expectations may leak into the world of physical education.

Teaching practices in PE classes are different than other subject areas as PE revolves around one's body. In a PE environment, "the body is judged for physical ability, but is also situated in a space that provides the potential for social comparisons and body judgements…the body is situated at the centre of experiences in physical education" (Kerner, Haerens & Kirk, 2018, p. 255). Attitudes towards bodies can be reflected in clothing choices and lesson content

(Kerner, Haerens & Kirk, 2018). In a study conducted by Flintoff and Scraton (2001), 15-year-old girls' perceptions of and attitudes towards PE class was low, as they felt uncomfortable when clothing revealed their bodies (as cited in Kerner, Haerens & Kirk, 2018). The theme of flexible clothing options has also emerged in a qualitative study by Allender et al. (2006) where "ill-fitting school uniforms were a barrier to physical education participation" (as cited in Kerner, Haerens & Kirk, 2018, p. 258). Participation in physical activity is essential to enhance body image (Kerner, Haerens & Kirk, 2018), so educators must remove their biases around what PE attire is and allow for student choice. Lesson content can also influence body image perceptions among students (Kerner, Haerens & Kirk, 2018). Czepczor-Bernat et al., (2023) did a study among adolescents in larger bodies and identified four major themes when asked about body image. One theme that emerged was an increase in feelings of guilt, shame, and stigmatization. All individuals have a relationship with their own body and perceive it in a certain way. With discussions around body image in PE settings can come feelings of discomfort, resistance, shame, and guilt. Specifically, concerns surrounding the desire to protect others from unhealthy eating practices, or being subject to weight prejudice may occur. However, although this may limit our desire to shift our thinking, it is the only way to move past colonial constructs of body image. Requiring someone to monitor their body often induces stress and shame, which can be more harmful than giving individuals the opportunity to listen to and trust their bodies. A meta-analysis of intuitive eating, also known as a non-diet approach to eating that focuses on body hunger cues, discusses how individuals who engage in intuitive eating practices are less likely to experience binge eating, emotional eating, or dietary restriction (Linardon, Tylka, & Fuller-Tyszkiewicz, 2021). Individuals practicing intuitive eating also experience increased awareness

of internal body cues, developed a greater appreciation for their own bodies, and tended to reject cultural appearance ideals more frequently (Linardon, Tylka, & Fuller-Tyszkiewicz, 2021).

Body Image and Fat-Phobia

Başer et al. (2021) define fat-phobia as having negative attitudes towards individuals in larger bodies. These attitudes can be rooted in conscious, or unconscious, biases that have been shaped over time in society. Furthermore, fat-phobia is a prejudice towards larger individuals, while body image is one's own subjective perception. Fat-phobia is increasing in society as the perception that weight can be solely controlled, and that being in a larger body is a reflection of the individual's identity, is also rising (Başer et al., 2021). A weight-centric approach sees all humans as able to achieve health and wellbeing, and therefore can limit their body size by losing weight, resulting in better health (Mauldin, May & Clifford, 2022). However, there are many intersections and reasons why an individual's body may look a certain way; our bodies are not a reflection of our whole identity.

The study conducted by Başer et al. (2021) aimed at understanding the relationship between fat phobia and body image perceptions. Interestingly, the study showed no relation between body satisfaction and fat phobia, and people who regularly do physical activity were found to be more fat phobic and more dissatisfied with their body (Başer et al., 2021). In addition, individuals who were focused more on their weight, participants with no chronic diseases, high socioeconomic status, and low body mass index (BMI) all had negative associations with their bodies (Başer et al., 2021). This study demonstrates that negative perceptions of body image and fat-phobia are not solely associated with individuals in larger bodies; fat phobia does not discriminate. Therefore, is it important to understand the historical foundations of fat-phobia, and how societal norms surrounding body image have been

constructed over time. To break the chains of fat-phobia, policy efforts need to be in effect that support positive body image and understanding for different bodies.

Historical Constructs of Anti-Fatness and Anti-Blackness in Fearing the Black Body: The Racial Origins of Fat Phobia

In her book *Fearing the Black Body: The Racial Origins of Fat Phobia,* Sabrina Strings (2019) discusses the historical underpinnings of fatness, fat-phobia, diet culture, and body image. Strings' narrative demonstrates how attitudes toward fatness did not stem from medical discoveries but rather, emerged from the Enlightenment period's notion that fatness symbolized "savagery". Strings (2019) demonstrates how bodies are used to not only validate class, but also gender and race (p.11).

Literature on bodies, specifically larger bodies, revealed beauty, and bodies were depicted as highly regarded prizes during the period of the Renaissance (Strings, 2019). During the high renaissance period (the late 15th to mid-16th century), black women became "meditations on beauty by the era's most important artists" (Strings, 2019, p. 17). Port cities, responsible for expanding the slave trade, saw an inclusion of black women depicted in art and representing beauty. However, as increasing numbers of slaves came from Africa into Europe, "black women were further denigrated due to their servile status" (Strings, 2019, p.17). The forced removal of Africans to Europe necessitated a new way to distinguish white Europeans from Blackness, specifically regarding social status. As Sabrina Strings (2019) states, black women "were typically rendered as the physically alluring social inferiors to white women, a representation that reified social distinctions," specifically, during the sixteenth century (p. 33). However, by the seventeenth century, there was a major shift in the aesthetic representations of black women to describe their bodies as inferior, little, and foul, while plump figures were being

associated with white women (Strings, 2019, p. 41). Furthermore, during similar times, English high society men began embracing thinness, while larger bodied women were seen as objects of men's desires (Strings, 2019, p. 41). Contrary to thinness, the idea of fatness in men signaled a lack of self-control, irrationality, and low intelligence (Strings, 2019, p. 41). Therefore, body size suggested not only social status but intellectual status as well.

As the slave trade continued to expand, black women continued to be represented in art and literature, however, "a 'proto-racist' discourse emerged that marked black women and men as unattractive, hypersexual, and diminutive in both size and social status" (Strings, 2019, p. 42). Furthermore, the English idea of intelligence and rationality being conducive to smaller bodies became a dominant ideology within Europe (Strings, 2019, p. 43). Black women depicted in Renaissance art shifted from being seen as body equals to social inferiors to white women (Strings, 2019, p. 48). The demonization of Black skin, Black bodies, and Black femininity became apparent and portrayed as excessive, inferior, and overly sexual (Strings, 2019).

While immigration increased in the nineteenth century, there was a fixation on maintaining the superiority of white bodies, and a continuous need to distinguish white from black. To achieve a distinction, food was used to depict social status, specifically through the consumption of "white gold," also known as sugar. While lower class Europeans were facing malnutrition and poverty, middle to high class individuals began consuming sugar in large quantities, and therefore, led to weight gain (Strings, 2019, p. 57). In 1620, English physician Tobias Venner saw the increase in excess body fat and used the term "obesus" to describe these cases (Strings, 2019, p. 57). As individuals, particularly high class white European men, began consuming sugar in large quantities, they also began indulging in "robust habits" of alcoholic

beverages (Strings, 2019, p. 57). These habits, although they led to weight gain, were associated with high intelligence and high social standing (Strings, 2019, p. 58).

In the coming years, French intellectuals Georges-Louis Leclerc (later named Comte de Buffon) and Denis Diderot began describing the sizes of women's bodies, specifically Black women, in relation to their geographical location (Strings, 2019, p. 83). Accounts of black Africans eating habits in Diderot's *Encyclopaedia* led to the societal credibility of overindulgence by "the vice of gluttony that was inherent to the black African's sumptuous way of life" (p. 82). Furthermore, Virey "used the language of bile theory to claim that fatness was directly correlated with skin color" (Strings, 2019, p. 86). This claim, linking race to body size, shifted individuals' interpretations of fatness, and created ideologies that were used to construct fatness as an indicator of laziness, immorality, and intellectual inferiority. According to Strings (2019), these "racial theories had linked fatness to blackness in the European imagination" and in addition, "linked thinness to whiteness" (p. 98).

The emergence of the obesity crisis and ideas of anti-fatness grew from the perception of individuals not wanting to be seen as inferior or unable to exercise self-control. Puritan reformer Thomas Muffet, during the seventeenth century, wrote about avoiding overindulgence and self-control. However, it was not until the middle of the seventeenth century that self-control was brought into conversation among Europeans, specifically the English (Strings, 2019, p. 105). Muffet's assertions focused primarily on men, however, George Cheyne was interested in the food consumption of women, specifically high-class aristocrats, and he suggested they limit their food intake and follow a strict diet that could include fasting and purging (Strings, 2019, p. 106-107). One of his followers, Selina Hastings, was a leader in the Methodist movement at the time and encouraged women to follow and fulfill their duty to their church by cleansing their bodies

(Strings, 2019, p. 107). A standard of beauty became apparent, and in the eighteenth century, women began widespread dieting to demonstrate gluttony and indulgence was beneath them (Strings, 2019, p, 107). Avoiding cravings was seen as a badge of honor and a process that was available to upper class women, therefore, relating body size and diet to social status. Strings (2019) states that "fat, presumed to be the product of immoral and irrational intemperance, was considered lowbrow" and unattractive to men (p. 110).

The nineteenth century gave rise to the slender aesthetic and favored white, Protestant women who immigrated to the United States. As immigration increased, so did a fixation on maintaining the superiority of white bodies and using body size to exemplify intelligence. Anglo-Saxon Protestant women strived to be thin as it was a way to not only demonstrate their temperance to God but also their racial superiority (Strings, 2019, p. 122). The immigration of individuals to the United States led to widespread fear of being labeled racially as Black, therefore, making "thinness a key goal for Anglo-Saxon Protestant women during the nineteenth century" (Strings, 2019, p. 122). By the mid nineteenth century, women's magazines such as *Harper's Bazar* were established to discuss fashion, diet, and American beauty standards (Strings, 2019, p. 140). Discussions around fatness suggested it was a dangerous state, a crime, and a deformity and difficult to make clothes for women in these larger bodies (Strings, 2019, p. 144). To conform to an "American Beauty" standard, diet culture began to rise, and the emergence of the obesity crisis grew out of ideologies that were used to construct fatness as an indicator of laziness, immorality, and intellectual inferiority.

Connections among race, weight, and beauty had been popularized and discussed in women's magazines, but the twentieth century saw a rise in these discussions happening in academic articles and mainstream media newspapers (Strings, 2019, p. 156). A "thin ideal relied

on a new scientific language: eugenics" (Strings, 2019, p. 156). Charles Darwin's cousin, Francis Galton, claimed that "mental and physical characteristics, such as intellect and beauty, were inherited" (Strings, 2019, p. 158). Inherited characteristics led to another instance of linking body size with race, suggesting some races were inherently susceptible to obesity (Strings, 2019, p. 158). Specific representations of European women, such as individuals from northern and western Europe, became the mainstream standard of beauty (Strings, 2019, p. 159). However, physicians used moral and racial logic to relate fatness to race, specifically fatness to blackness.

Sabrina Strings (2019) claims that "the fear of the imagined "fat black woman" was created by racial and religious ideologies that have been used to both degrade black women and discipline white women" (p. 6). In addition, while the desire to be thin was gaining initial appeal in the Unites States, it focused heavily on depictions of elite white women compared to working-class people of color (Strings, 2019). Being thin not only suggested strong morals due to food restriction but was a form of American exceptionalism aimed at separating white folks from black folks (Strings, 2019). By understanding the historical underpinnings of fatness, fat-phobia, and thinness, we can look at ways to decolonize weight stigma and its racial origins. Colonization has influenced negative understandings of body image, and we continue to perpetuate these ideals in institutions such as schools (Kinsley, 2022). To work at decolonizing bodies, we must first understand the historical foundations, pick apart diet culture, and reject weight biases that are embedded in westernized society.

The Influence of Physical Education Classes on Body Image: Teacher Perceptions and Biases

Body image is a social construction that has been culturally and historically embedded in society (Varea and Underwood, 2016). PE teachers may have biases that influence their perceptions of health that are weight-centric, equating health with body size, shape, and weight

(Varea and Underwood, 2016). If educators want to create inclusive, safe spaces, there needs to be a removal of biases towards bodies and embrace a weight neutral approach to perceiving bodies that emphasizes emotional and physical wellness over the pursuit of a lower weight or body size to remove the stigma faced by individuals in larger bodies (Mauldin, May & Clifford, 2022).

Varea and Underwood (2016) use a Foucauldian perspective, focusing on surveillance and normalization, to explore how Australian pre-service (PS) Health and Physical Education (HPE) specialist teachers construct fatness. Previous research discusses how an individual's understanding of health and body image is constructed when they are young, which creates subjectivity and weight bias as they become educators. However, in this study, three semi-structured interviews were conducted with each pre-service teacher (PST). The results suggested that participants believe there is an ideal and normal body size; If individuals do not fit within that body size norm, or non-fat body, they are considered unhealthy, deviant, immoral, repulsive, and not able to take responsibility for their health (Varea & Underwood, 2016). Furthermore, some participants constructed paternalistic discourses by feeling pity and sorrow for people considered fat (Varea & Underwood, 2016). This study demonstrates the power, and danger, in normalizing body sizes. A method of self-surveillance suggests that individuals have full responsibility for what their body size is. However, Varea and Underwood (2016) state is not always the case; There are many factors that can influence an individual's body size. Preconceived notions and perceptions of body image are prevalent among Australian PS HPE specialists who participated in this study (Varea & Underwood, 2016).

Tingle et al. (2023) discusses teachers' discomfort in teaching health education. The personal attitudes and behaviors of teachers "related to body image, eating behaviors, and

physical activity, are critically important within the context… in schools" (p. 50). Consequently, "without adequate training in health promotion, teachers may be left to rely on their own beliefs and attitudes when engaging in health promotion efforts and discussing health with their students" (Tingle et al., 2023, p. 50). One's own beliefs and attitudes can lead to possible unintended consequences linked to personal weight biases and perceptions of body image. As cited in Tingle et al., (2023), Vamos and Zhou (2009), found that when teachers reported discomfort and barriers to teaching about health education, specifically around weight, diet culture, and nutrition, the teachers themselves are "often members of a high-risk population for increased body dissatisfaction, dieting, and eating disorders" (Yager & O'Dea, 2009, as cited in Tingle et al., 2023). An individual's personal values, beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, and experiences can influence teaching, modeling, and willingness to discuss health related topics (Morgan & Bourke, 2008; Piran, 2004; as cited in Tingle et al., 2023).

Furthermore Lynagh et al., (2015, as cited in Tingle et al., 2023), found that physical education and health teachers hold stronger anti-fat biases and lower expectations for students in larger bodies than their non specialist teacher's counterpart, also known as physical education generalist teachers. Weight bias, defined as negative attitudes, beliefs, and stereotypes about individuals in larger bodies, is prevalent in school settings (Tingle et al., 2023). Specifically, there is a bias increase in PE classes as one's body "is a focus of curricular learning outcomes" (Kenner, Haerens & Kirk, 2018). Although intended to support healthy learning in health and physical education classes, health promotion efforts have the potential to unintentionally reinforce weight biases, support societal expectations related to body image, and include personal beliefs about body size from the perspective of the teacher (Tingle et al., 2023). PE specialists have expressed how one's body size is a measure of health, and that it is easy to

engage in exercise; it is an individual responsibility to get fit and healthy (Varea and Underwood, 2016). PE specialists constructed fat bodies as deviant and abnormal, and "assumed the existence of a 'right direction', or a singular pathway" to coach students in larger bodies (Varea and Underwood, 2016, p. 474). In addition, this study by Varea and Underwood (2016), found PE specialist' were disciplined to take care, or self-surveil, "their own bodies in one 'correct' way and felt a responsibility to teach others to do the same" (p. 474). The deeply engrained ways of viewing bodies are prevalent among PE specialists, and may significantly impact teaching pedagogy (Kerner, Haerens & Kirk, 2018).

In North American culture, societal weight bias is reinforced by sociocultural ideals of thinness and negative stereotypes about fatness (Winter et al., 2024). The school setting is a common environment where youth face weight stigma, leading to negative perceptions of body image, from educators and PST (Nutter et al., 2019). In a study conducted by Nutter et al., (2019), results indicated explicit and implicit weight bias among non-specialist, and specialist, PE teachers (Fontana et al., 2013; Lau et al., 2018). In addition, the belief that children in larger bodies have control over their body weight was determined among teachers (Shackleton et al., 2014, as cited in Nutter et al., 2019). Educational settings have the potential to "significantly impact individuals' well-being and educational experiences" (Nutter et al., 2019, p. 195). Weight bias exists within these settings, and the study conducted by Nutter et al., (2019) demonstrates how students in K-12 schools frequently experience weight biases, and teachers' negative attitudes towards body size may have a negative impact on perceptions of student ability.

Biases surrounding food and bodies also appear in PE classes, as nutrition is an integral part of the curriculum (Alberta Education, 2000). The learning activities need to "emphasize positive messages and avoid increasing food anxiety for students" (Tingle et al., 2023, p. 54). To

promote positive eating practices, educators need to avoid categorizing food into groups such as "healthy food", "bad food", and "junk food" (Tingle et al., 2023, p. 54). Instead of putting one's personal bias towards what is healthy or unhealthy, we can move in a direction to learn how all food contributes to wellness in different ways; When we categorize food using our own bias, we associate negative weight-based characteristics and stereotypes to the individuals who consume them (Tingle et al., 2023, p. 54). Educators can help re-shape relationships around food and bodies, but negative weight-based biases and beliefs need to be avoided.

Intervention Research

Intervention research is focused on evidence-based intervention practices and rigorous evaluation of the intervention strategy (McBride, 2016). Intervention research is common in health programs and begins with identification of a risk factor and finishes with an intervention that addresses the risk that can be applied to future policy and practice (McBride, 2016). The below approaches have been used in various environments, such as schools, to address body image concerns among youth.

Weight Neutral Approaches

Weight neutral approaches focus on removing judgments and stigma surrounding individuals in larger bodies (Mauldin, May & Clifford, 2022). By moving in a neutral direction, bodies are not a defining factor to self-worth, or reflection of one's health (Mauldin, May & Clifford, 2022). Weight biases exist when negative, weight related attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and judgments are passed towards individuals in larger bodies, adding to the social weight stigma experienced in society by individuals who do not fit within the societal norm of body weight and shape (Mauldin, May & Clifford, 2022). Weight bias with PST and in-service teachers is prevalent within the K-12 school settings (Nutter et al., 2019). In a study conducted

by Robinson, Bacon, and O'Reilly (1993), the number of individuals who had negative body image attitudes and anti-fat attitudes decreased after weight neutral intervention practices. Intervention was done in group sessions and focused on open communication around body image and self-esteem programming and looking at broadening standards of beauty and body size (Robinson et al., 1993). Catunda et al., (2017) also claimed that "intervention programs had a positive effect on the adolescent perception of body image" (p. 96). Furthermore, Tingle et al., (2023) argue for weight neutral approaches "as a preferred framework for promoting and discussing health among all members of a school community" (p. 50).

Though these intervention programs may differ throughout the years, there is a strong shift towards weight neutral approaches through the Comprehensive School Health (CSH) Framework. The CSH framework is based on evidence that healthy students learn better, and engaging in a weight-neutral approach, rather than a weight-centric approach, can best support a student's wellbeing through food relationships, rejecting stigma, and prioritizing holistic wellbeing, rather than focusing on physical appearance (Tingle et al., 2023).

Lindsay and Lexie Kite (2020) discuss ways to view one's body without using weight biases and understand how individuals are more than their body shape or size. When discussing bodies, individuals can feel shame, despair, depression, or embarrassment (Kite & Kite, 2020). It is through these emotions that objectification of our bodies comes alive; we see ourselves as a direct reflection of our body. According to Lindsay and Lexie Kite (2020), body neutrality, or body acceptance, understands all bodies are beautiful, regardless of appearance, or ability. Body neutrality approach focuses on body image resilience which can "give you the ability to prioritize your own first-person perspective on your incredible body- regardless of how you look or how you or others feel about your looks" (p. 31). Our bodies are not the sole piece of our identity;

educators and schools need to work on delivering weight neutral approaches to foster healthy relationships with body image among youth.

Health at Every Size (HAES) Approach

The Health at Every Size (HAES) is a weight-neutral approach that focuses on promoting healthy behaviors in people with different body sizes and "enhancing pleasure derived from consuming food to achieve sustainable healthy eating outcomes" (Sabatini et al., 2019). According to Dungmore et al., (2020), the HAES paradigm was constructed by the Association for Size Diversity and Health[1]. In addition, HAES has been increasingly accepted and used by eating disorder organizations and psychologists and offered as an alternative to weight focused interventions (Dungmore et al., 2020). The paradigm relies on five principles: weight inclusivity, health enhancement, respectful care, eating for well-being, and life-enhancing movement (Dungmore et al., 2020). Many weight neutral approaches such as mindful eating and body neutrality use HAES principles as their foundation (Dungmore et al., 2020). Using a HAES approach has contributed to long term beneficial effects on eating behaviors related to hunger (Provencher et al., 2009), body acceptance and increased wellbeing (Scagliusi et al., 2020). A HAES framework aims to support multiple dimensions of wellness, rather than seeing body size as a contributor to self-worth and health.

In a Direction for Change

Suggested Practices for Educators and Schools

According to the Comprehensive School Health Model, which uses weight neutral approaches to learning, "school health promotion should consider the whole person, not just

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[1] To learn more about The Association for Size Diversity and Health, go to https://asdah.org/

physical health" (Tingle et al., 2023, p. 52). Within schools, understanding weight neutral approaches can be difficult, as teachers have reported feelings of unpreparedness, due to lack of formal training in this area of discourse (Nocentini et al., 2019, cited in Tingle et al., 2023). Tingle et al., (2023) state that the "learning activities and resources a teacher relies on in their instruction should be weight neutral" (p. 54).

Therefore, the suggested approaches for educators and schools to also meet the guiding principles of the CSH frameworks are as follows: teaching and learning, social and physical environment, healthy school policy, and partnerships and services. The approaches are categorized into three main groups: student focused, food focused, and wellbeing focused (Anastácio & Arnold, Forthcoming). Further, all practices are created on the foundation of body neutrality to help foster a shift in body image among youth. Anastácio and Arnold (Forthcoming) provide ways individuals can begin re-writing body and food narratives in tangible and actionable ways.

1. *Student Focused*

    a. Focus on aspects of students' identity outside of their appearance

    b. Focus on recognition and celebration of intersectional identities

    c. Focus on representation by including a variety of cultures, gender identities, and body sizes

    d. Focus on messages about bodies in social media and how they perpetuate attitudes around shame, guilt, and silence

2. *Food Focused*

    a. Avoid labeling foods as healthy and unhealthy, or good and bad

       i.   Instead, explore the different ways food can meet different needs. To encourage students to connect their bodies with their own identities, have conversations around how food supports different dimensions of our wellbeing

  b. Avoid praising individuals for eating specific foods and specific food amounts

  c. Avoid commenting on your own or students' bodies, even if it is a compliment

       i.   Commenting on bodies provides the message that certain bodies can be more desirable than others and that our bodies reflect our identity

  d. Avoid silence around diet culture and weight bias

       i.   Critically examine social media posts, magazines, and commercials. We cannot dismantle these systems all at once but we can increase media literacy and understanding of the weight biases present to support students in recognizing and challenging these messages

3. *Wellbeing Focused*

  a. Build positive relationships with our bodies

       i.   Students need to "listen to their bodies" and eat when their bodies are giving them hunger or fullness cues

  b. Embrace a Health at Every Size (HAES) approach

       i.   Focus on how well-being is an essential component of student achievement and success

  c. Include flexible clothing options for physical education classes

i. The curriculum asks us to formatively and summatively assess students based on outcomes, not apparel. Educators need to exclude their own personal biases regarding what individuals who exercise are expected to wear

d. Include inclusive games

i. Games, activities, and movement breaks need to be inclusive and equitable to all levels of learners, and body sizes

Limitations for Practice and Implementation

Although the review of the literature highlights the impact of weight bias and body image within school environments, not all aspects of weight bias or weight-related issues are captured. School based health promotion efforts need to address multiple dimensions of wellness and support all students no matter their body size. However, there are limitations to this suggestion. As teachers go through life and experience it through their own bodies, personal biases may become deeply ingrained in their own pedagogy, which can lead to reluctancy to unlearn and relearn. According to Lucibello et al., (2023) the weight-normative approach to health, which dominate Western society, are driven by numerous assumptions, including that weight alone is a key indicator of health, that weight is controllable, and that weight loss is sustainable and safe (p. 271). Furthermore, feelings of shame and guilt because one's body size increase as their weight is a component of their social status and acceptance of others (Lucibello et al., 2023). If educators want to protect children from weight prejudice and fatphobia, then educators need to resist the systems that perpetuate these perspectives. More knowledge on the factors that impact weight biases in teachers is needed moving forward, specifically to understand how past

experiences, and understanding of bodies and body image impact the way educators teach about body related concepts.

Final Thoughts and Extended Learning

If we want students to feel good about their bodies, then the way we look at and speak about food and bodies must change. We need to critically examine educator biases to start picking apart, evaluating, challenging, and divesting from the systems where our current perspectives are rooted. Our bodies are only one part of our identity and arguably the least meaningful (Raypole, 2020). Educators need to dismantle their biases and decentralize bodies as a contributor to self-worth.

The Portuguese language uses the word *Saudade* to express a state of longing, yearning, and wistfulness (Wieczorek, 2023). The *Saudade* way of thinking links to Portuguese cultural values and the process of colonialism (Wieczorek, 2023). I chose to use this word as the title of my paper to signify the long, yearning process many individuals go through to achieve their idea of a perfect body. Similar to the historical underpinning of *Saudade*, colonial constructs bind individuals in shackles of shame, fear, and guilt about their bodies, rooted in body image. However, schools and educators can encourage health promoting initiatives that promote weight neutral approaches to understanding food and bodies (Tingle et al., 2023). Together, we can redefine body image beyond colonial constructs, moving away from a state of *Saudade*, and creating environments where all bodies are loved.

Further Resources for Learning

Below is a list of further resources for learning[2].

Social Media and Podcasts [3]

- Maintenance Phase

- Unsolicited: Fatties Talking Back

- @antidietfatty

- @bodyimage_therapist

- @sonyareneetaylor

Books

- *The Body Is Not an Apology* by Sonya Renee Taylor

- *More than a Body: Your Body Is an Instrument, Not an Ornament* by Dr. Lexie Kite and

  Dr. Lindsay Kite

- *Fearing the Black Body* by Sabrina Strings

If you, a loved one, or anyone you know is struggling with their relationship with food and/or

their body image, then please find support through the following Canadian Helplines[4]:

- If you are in distress, contact the Mental Health Helpline at 1-877-303-2642

- For non-urgent manners, please contact the National Eating Disorder Information Centre

  at 1-866-633-4220

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[2] These resources have been approved by Monica Arnold, a registered psychologist with the Alberta Wellness Center for Eating Disorders. Monica has specialized training in working with folks who are experiencing disordered eating/exercise, eating disorders, and body image concerns.
[3] Available for download wherever readers get their podcasts.
[4] Services only available in Canada

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