

Introducing “Symbolic Weightism”: Discourses of Agency and Morality in Obesity Stigma

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ABSTRACT

Background: With the increasing obesity rates in the United States and the United Kingdom, the number of weight-based discrimination cases continues to rise. **Purpose:** This study compares obesity stigma to racial stigma, a link first proposed by Crandall (1994), to frame weight-based discrimination as an equally legitimate and severe form of prejudice. **Methods:** With the increasing obesity rates in the United States and the United Kingdom, the number of weight-based discrimination cases continues to rise. This study compares obesity stigma to racial stigma, a link first proposed by Crandall (1994), to frame weight-based discrimination as an equally legitimate and severe form of prejudice. **Results:** Being overweight was primarily considered an individual’s problem, like race, yet it was deeply tied to ideas of nation. Dominant discourses of personal agency and morality also emerged, with weight gain being perceived as intentional and sinful across the texts. **Conclusions:** It is proposed that, similar to symbolic racism, these antifat discourses stem from greater individualistic and Christian ideologies, which have endured in medical, religious, and national institutions. Therefore, the current state of obesity stigma can be conceptualized as a form of *symbolic weightism*.

KEY WORDS: Obesity, Stigma, Ideology, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)