

Title

Weight Stigma in Educational Settings: A Critical Reflection and Conceptual Exploration

Research Overview (50 words)

This paper synthesizes evidence on weight stigma as a systemic educational equity issue, tracing how anti-fat bias operates through peer dynamics, teacher bias, and institutional policy gaps across K-12 and higher education, with implications for counselor education and equity-oriented reform in Taiwan.

Purpose

Despite extensive attention to race, gender, and disability in educational equity research, body size and weight stigma remain conspicuously absent from mainstream equity discourse -- an absence this paper argues is itself a form of institutional complicity. Weight is the most common target for school bullying, more prevalent than bullying based on ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation (Hughes et al., 2025). A systematic review of 45 studies confirmed that weight bias among students and teachers negatively impacts health, psychological well-being, and academic achievement (Nutter et al., 2019), yet most school anti-bullying policies do not mention weight. Weight bias is observable from age 3 and by age 9 is as prevalent as racial bias among adults -- schools do not merely reflect societal prejudice, they actively reproduce it.

Teacher bias adds a second layer of harm. Langford et al. (2022) documented that teachers unconsciously underestimate the academic potential of students with obesity, misreading shame-driven withdrawal as disengagement or lack of ability; Finn et al. (2020) found evidence of biased grading. Nearly one-third of women with overweight history reported having had a teacher biased against them. Students are thus stigmatized by peers and underestimated by educators -- a double disadvantage compounded for those already facing poverty or other marginalization.

The harm extends beyond graduation. Internalized weight bias (IWB) -- the process by which individuals absorb anti-fat attitudes and apply them to self-evaluation -- is the key mechanism through which school-based stigma accumulates into adult psychological harm (Pearl, 2025; Nutter et al., 2024). IWB predicts depression, low self-esteem, and body image disturbance independent of actual BMI. The educational setting is not merely where stigma occurs -- it is where shame is installed.

In Taiwan, where adult overweight and obesity prevalence reached 50.3% in 2017-2020 (MOHW, 2023), this pipeline has received scant attention. Weight stigma is absent from Taiwan counseling and teacher education curricula (McHugh, 2019; Kerl-McClain et al., 2022) -- professionals treating the aftermath of educational stigma have rarely been trained to recognize its origin.

This paper proposes that educational scholarship must engage weight stigma through two inseparable lenses: as a social justice issue requiring institutional change, and as a psychological harm requiring trained professional response. Reform without professional competency will not reach students already carrying shame; training without structural change will not prevent the next generation from accumulating it.

Methods

This paper employs a narrative literature review methodology. Searches were conducted across PubMed, PsycINFO, ERIC, and Web of Science using keyword clusters combining weight stigma, anti-fat bias, and obesity stigma with education, school, teacher, counselor, and university, limited to peer-reviewed publications in English and Chinese from 2007 to 2025. After applying inclusion criteria (educational settings, IWB mechanisms, counselor or teacher training, policy analyses), 52 studies were retained for thematic synthesis (Thomas and Harden, 2008) organized around three domains: (1) prevalence of weight bias in educational settings; (2) mechanisms linking school stigma to adult psychological harm via IWB; and (3) gaps in counselor and teacher education. Findings are situated within a social justice framework with attention to non-WEIRD generalizability and the Taiwanese cultural context.

Results/Discussion

The review yields three convergent findings. First, weight stigma in educational settings is a systemic equity failure: evidence from the included studies documents pervasive weight bias among students and teachers across K-12 and higher education, with consistent effects on academic achievement, psychological well-being, and professional help-seeking (Hughes et al., 2025; Nutter et al., 2019). Second, a clear developmental mechanism links school stigma to adult psychological harm: IWB emerges as the primary internalization pathway, with IWB-depression associations ($\beta = .11$ to $.38$) and IWB-body image associations (r up to $.75$) remaining significant after controlling for BMI. Notably, no reviewed study traced this pathway specifically from school-origin stigma to adult counseling contexts -- a gap this paper makes explicit. Third, the review surfaces a structural training failure: weight stigma is systematically absent from multicultural competency frameworks in teacher and counselor education, with pre-service trainees demonstrating significant anti-fat bias that persists without explicit intervention (Bolter et al., 2023; McHugh, 2019).

For Taiwan, the review surfaces a compounded gap: high obesity prevalence, Confucian norms normalizing family body commentary, and near-total absence of weight stigma from counseling and teacher training. The paper proposes evidence-based recommendations for integrating fat-affirmative educational equity principles into anti-bullying policy and counselor multicultural competency standards in Taiwan and East Asian contexts.

Keywords

weight stigma; educational equity; anti-fat bias; internalized weight bias; counselor education; teacher bias; school policy; Taiwan; social justice; body size

Yang, Li-Hsiang | leon8333@gmail.com | ORCID: 0009-0000-1009-6374

National Taiwan Normal University | Advisor: Prof. Tien, Hsiu-Lan

主題

肥胖歧視在教育現場：反思與文獻探索

研究概述 (75 字)

本文以文獻回顧方式，系統性地探討肥胖歧視作為教育現場的結構性公平問題，整合同儕霸凌、教師偏見與制度政策缺口三個面向的實證，並分析其透過內化體重偏見（IWB）延伸至成人心理健康的發展性機制，提出台灣脈絡下的諮商師與教師培訓改革建議。

研究目的

教育公平研究已廣泛探討種族、性別、身障等議題的歧視，然而體型歧視（Sizeism）在主流教育公平論述中幾乎缺席。本文主張此缺席並非偶然，而是制度性共謀的一種形式。Hughes 等人（2025）的最新研究確認，體重是學校中最常見的霸凌目標，遠超過種族、宗教或性傾向；Nutter 等人（2019）的 45 項研究系統性回顧確認，教育現場的體重偏見廣泛存在於學生和教師之間，對學生健康、心理幸福感與學業成就造成負面影響，然而多數學校的反霸凌政策均未明文涵蓋體重。體重偏見早在 3 歲即可觀察到，9 歲時已與成人的種族偏見同等普遍——學校不只反映社會偏見，更主動複製它。

教師偏見構成另一層傷害。Langford 等人（2022）記錄，教師無意識地低估肥胖學生的學業潛力，將羞恥驅動的退縮誤讀為缺乏參與意願或能力；Finn 等人（2020）發現有評分偏差的實證。將近三分之一有過重經驗的女性表示曾有老師因其體重而存有偏見。學生不只受到同儕歧視，更被本應支持其成長的教育者系統性地低估。

這些傷害並不隨畢業而消散，而是透過內化體重偏見（IWB）延伸至成人期——IWB 是個體將反肥胖社會態度內化為自我評價的歷程，是學校污名積累為成人心理傷害的關鍵機制（Pearl, 2025）。IWB 獨立預測憂鬱、低自尊與身體意象困擾，不受實際 BMI 影響。教育現場不只是污名發生之處，更是羞恥感被安裝之處。

台灣成人過重及肥胖盛行率於 2017-2020 年已達 50.3%（衛福部，2023），此從學校到成人的污名傳遞路徑在台灣幾乎未受系統性研究。McHugh（2019）與 Kerl-McClain 等人（2022）記錄，包含台灣在內，體型歧視在諮商師與教師訓練課程中系統性缺席，意味著處理教育污名後遺症的專業人員，往往從未被訓練去辨識他們正在治療之傷口的起源。

本文因此主張，教育研究必須從兩個互補視角面對肥胖歧視：作為需要制度性結構改革的社會正義問題，以及作為需要受訓專業回應的心理傷害問題。兩者不可分割——沒有專業能力的制度改革無法觸及已帶著羞恥感的學生；沒有結構改革的專業訓練無法阻止下一代繼續積累它。

研究方法

本文採敘事性文獻回顧方法。研究者在 PubMed、PsycINFO、ERIC 及 Web of Science 四個資料庫，以體重污名 / weight stigma、反肥胖偏見 / anti-fat bias、肥胖污名 / obesity stigma，結合教育 / education、學校 / school、教師 / teacher、諮商師 / counselor 等關鍵詞進行搜尋，限定 2007–2025 年發表的中英文同儕審查文獻，初步收錄逾 400 筆。依納入標準（聚焦教育現場、IWB 機制、諮商師或教師訓練、相關政策分析），最終保留 52 篇進行主題合成（Thomas & Harden, 2008），圍繞三個面向組織：（1）教育現場體重偏見的普遍性；（2）學校污名透過 IWB 連結至成人心理傷害的機制；（3）諮商師與教師教育訓練的缺口。研究結果置於社會正義與教育公平框架中詮釋，並特別關注非 WEIRD 族群的推論效度與台灣文化脈絡。

研究結果與討論

文獻回顧產生三項聚合性發現。第一，教育現場的肥胖歧視是系統性的公平失敗：納入研究一致記錄 K–12 與高等教育中體重偏見對學業成就、心理幸福感及專業求助意願造成持續影響（Hughes et al., 2025; Nutter et al., 2019）。第二，清晰的發展性機制連結學校污名與成人心理傷害：IWB 是主要內化路徑，IWB—憂鬱關聯的效果量（ $\beta = .11$ 至 $.38$ ）及 IWB—身體意象關聯（ r 高達 $.75$ ）在控制 BMI 後仍顯著。值得注意的是，無任何納入研究追蹤此路徑從學校起源至成人諮商脈絡的完整鏈結，此為本文明確指認的文獻缺口。第三，文獻揭示結構性訓練失敗：體重污名在多元文化能力架構中系統性缺席，職前受訓者普遍持有反肥胖偏見，且未受明確介入即不會自然消退（Bolter et al., 2023; McHugh, 2019）。

對台灣而言，文獻揭示複合性缺口：高盛行率、儒家文化中家庭成員直接評論體型的規範化現象，以及諮商師與教師訓練近乎完全缺乏體重污名議題。本文提出以證據為基礎的建議，呼籲在台灣及東亞脈絡中，將體型肯定的教育公平原則整合至反霸凌政策、教師職前培訓及諮商師多元文化能力標準。

關鍵字

體重污名、教育公平、反肥胖偏見、內化體重偏見、諮商師教育、教師偏見、學校政策、台灣、社會正義、體型