

1st Sesion

Social perceptions and attitudes towards corpulent children and adolescents

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According to disciplinary interests and methods, research on overweight and obesity considers quite diverse aspects of these phenomena, identifies different causes of overweight and obesity and, as a result, recommends specific interventions. In the light of these extensive research agendas, it is striking that the individuals and groups themselves are rarely asked how social attitudes and political discourses on overweight and obese bodies affect their lives and how they deal with these expectations. Based on secondary data analysis of semi-structured interviews, we studied children and adolescents' perceptions, attitudes and strategies in relation to overweight and obesity. The aim was to examine how young people perceive and deal with the social and political expectations of their bodies in light of obesity. Based on our sample, we found the corpulent body to be a subject during nearly all daily routine interactions between young people. Children or adolescents with normal weight bodies recognised and evaluated corpulent bodies. For example, they associate laziness and sickness with corpulence. The corpulent, by contrast, perceive themselves and all aspects of their lives in relation to their body shape. As a consequence, the corpulent are not able to distance themselves from relating everything to their body shape. Thus the perceptions and attitudes they are confronted with are constitutive for their self-consciousness about their bodies. In contrast to what is often assumed, corpulent children and adolescents do not have less nutritional knowledge and they exercise this knowledge in same way as normal weight children and adolescents. We identified distinct groups with respect to self-presentation in interactions. In the context of the interview situation, young interviewees with normal weight bodies acted without any hesitation or indecision, but the corpulent were anxious and tended to try to control their self-presentation.

References

Eva Barlösius, Axel Philipps: How social attitudes and expectations of obese bodies affect the self-constitution of normal weight and corpulent youth, Hannover 2009 (submitted)

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Prof. Dr. Eva Barlösius was born in Hannover in 1959. She is Professor of Sociology at the Leibniz University Hannover and has been researching the sociology of food for more than twenty years. She is currently coordinating a project on concepts of adipositas prevention for socially disadvantaged children and adolescents. She has published numerous books and articles on manifold social and cultural aspects of eating and food. Her most well-known publication on this subject is: *Soziologie des Essens. Soziologie des Essens. Eine sozial- und kulturwissenschaftliche Einführung in die Ernährungsforschung. Soziologische Grundlagentexte.* Weinheim: Juventa 1999. The second edition is in preparation.