Weight Stigma

The ‘social devaluation and denigration of people perceived to carry excess weight’ (Tomiyama, 2014). (Emphasis mine)

Small but growing body of evidence for impact of weight stigma in psychotherapy:

Method

Stage 1 – online questionnaire with clients of size about experiences of psychotherapy.
35 detailed qualitative responses (70 responses overall)
Participants from UK, US, Canada & Australia
Phenomenological, Thematic Analysis

Stage 2 – pending ethical approval. In depth interviews. Client and therapist experience of productive/affirmative therapeutic dialogue about size.

Preliminary Findings: People of Size (POS) experience a series of barriers to productive conversations about size and weight stigma in their psychotherapeutic relationships.

Is the environment accessible and welcoming?

‘I’ve had issues with furniture with a provider, but I’m too self-conscious to ask them to get a waiting room chair with no arms, so I try to squish in and balance on the end of the chair.’ (16:6:13-14).

‘... there was a rack with medical pamphlets, including literature about diabetes, weight loss, and bariatric surgery. I often found myself side-eyeing those particular pamphlets before each session began.’ (7:4:13).

Do I perceive my therapist to be understanding of weight bias/thin privilege?

‘I have never had a therapist who was fat-positive. I would be surprised if a thin person could ever understand what it is like to be fat.’ (16:6:15).

‘I was nervous that... talking about my fatness would prompt my therapist to start recommending weight loss when that wasn’t what I wanted.’ (6:2:1-2).

I want to talk about it!

How my body interacts with the world around me, and how I treat it has a lot to do with my anxiety and other concerns. Having a space to interact with that would have been helpful. (11:11:10-13).

References