***IT’S NOT MY FAULT I MIGHT BE HEAVIER:* PERSPECTIVES OF CHILDREN WITH ASD REGARDING WEIGHT AND BODY IMAGE**

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**Objectives:** Childhood overweight and obesity (OW/OB) rates are rising in Canada, and have recently surpassed adult obesity rates. While weight alone is not an indicator of health, the prevalence of higher weight in combination with weight related stigma puts children at risk for the development of numerous physical and psychosocial conditions. Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) are up to 30% more likely to have OW/OB than their typically developing peers. Health Care Providers (HCPs) play a key role in ensuring the health and wellbeing of this population. However, the ways in which HCPs discuss weight has the potential to greatly affect the health and wellbeing of this population. In order for HCPs to have important conversations about weight with this population, we need to know what the children themselves think is important to talk about. According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child, children are entitled to play an active role in matters pertaining to their care. To ensure the voices of children are at the forefront of their care, we explored the perspectives of children with ASD with regards to weight and their bodies.

**Methods:** Eight semi-structured arts-mediated interviews were conducted with children between the ages of 10-18 with ASD. Interviews were analyzed using a phenomenological approach within an interpretive paradigm.

**Results:** One overarching theme and two sub-themes emerged from the data. The overarching theme was that weight was not a concern for these participants. Despite the normative notion that weight is a sensitive topic, participants freely discussed getting weighed and having weight-related conversations. The first sub-theme was that the participants had a positive sense of body image, which is typically not associated with a person with OW/OB. The second sub-theme was that the children valued being physically active.

**Discussion/Conclusion:** The participants challenged the dominant discourse in society that higher weight equates to poor body image and an unwillingness to be physically active. To promote these positive relationships we propose a call to action to shift normative focus in health care from weight and body size to a focus on health and growth in order to promote child-centered care. By emphasizing growth and health, priorities can shift to overall physical, social and psychological wellbeing, rather than a preoccupation with weight and size alone. This shift can potentially reduce the reinforcement of weight stigma by HCPs. This research brings forth the voices of children with ASD, who are so frequently excluded from research. It therefore enables their voices to be at the forefront of the care impacting their lives.

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