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Healthy Bodies

In Picture Books & Children's Talk

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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Abstract

This thesis explores the health and body discourses in children's picture books, and in their talk. In part one I begin with an overview of the constructions in a broad selection of picture books, before narrowing down on seven key books for a multimodal critical discourse analysis (MMCDA). Overall, the books offered diverse constructions of health, bodies, food and physical activity; in contrast, those key books that focused on health reproduced dominant healthist discourses, where health was constructed in relation to diet and doing deliberate exercise. However, while this kind of 'healthy living' was constructed as what you *should* do, it was simultaneously shown as boring and unpleasant. In terms of bodies, the stories reproduced an 'or you'll get fat' discourse (reminiscent of widespread obesity discourses) where being fat was constructed as the negative consequence of failing to do 'healthy living' correctly; and was associated with being greedy, lazy, humorous and unable. While the stories also offer some critique of these assumptions about health and bodies, these messages were often ambiguous or contradicted within and between the stories, and it was unclear how children 'read' these. For part two then, I conducted discussion groups with children (aged 6-7 years), to explore how the children made sense of the picture books in this context, as well as the health and body discourses they drew on in their talk. Predominantly, participants interpreted the stories in line with widespread healthist and obesity discourses, displaying their knowledge of what you should and shouldn't eat, and constructing the fat characters negatively as 'too fat', with advice about how to change this. Their responses were mixed in terms of how they engaged with the critical elements of the stories. However, they also drew on a discourse of 'growing big and strong' in relation to health, occasionally troubled the simplistic constructions of fatness, and through their talk and body language showed the importance of pleasure in relation to food and movement. This study adds to our understanding of how children negotiate healthy body discourses in their talk, and reinforces the need to continue to explore how to engage with children about health and media literacy in more critical ways, avoiding the pitfalls of fat stigma.

Acknowledgement

Thank you so much to my supervisors and family for your patience and belief in me throughout what turned into a long endeavour, alongside kids and life; I couldn't have made it without you.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application 15/27. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Prof Julie Boddy, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 06 350 5799 x 86055, email humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz

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Author	Published date	Title	Publisher
Allan, Nicholas	2004	*Cinderella's Bum*	Penguin Random House
Bently, Peter	2012	*The Yoga Ogre*	Simon & Schuster
Browne, Anthony	1984	*Willy the Wimp*	Walker Books
Chandler, Susan	2007	*Vegetable Glue*	Meadowside
Murphy, Jill	1989	*The Large Family: A Piece of Cake*	Walker Books
Willis, Jeanne	2010	*Flabby Cat and Slobby Dog*	Andersen Press
Carle, Eric	1970	*The Very Hungry Caterpillar*	Penguin
Edwards, Hazel	1994	*Look, there's a hippopotamus in the playground eating cake*	Penguin
Kerr, Judith	1968	*The Tiger Who Came to Tea*	Harper Collins
Allen, Pamela	2013	*Fat Ferdie*	Penguin Random House
Velthuijs, Max	1998	*Frog is frog*	Andersen Press
Mewburn, Kyle	2012	*Blue Gnu*	Scholastic
Springstubb, Tricia (illustrated by Jeff Newman)	2013	*Phoebe & Digger*	Candlewick
Tulloch, Scott	2009	*Piggy Poggett*	Harper Collins
Bennett, Elizabeth (illustrated by Jane Chapman)	2014	*Big and Small*	Tiger Tales

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Introduction

Children learn about health and bodies from a young age. From as young as three years old they seem to be aware of the sociocultural meanings about body shapes, particularly fatness and thinness (Cramer & Steinwert, 1998; Di Pasquale & Celsi, 2017; Harriger et al., 2010; Latner & Stunkard, 2003; Spiel et al., 2012), and from when they start primary school (if not earlier) they are inundated with particular messages about the importance of being healthy (Burrows et al., 2018; Burrows & Wright, 2007; Leahy & Wright, 2016; Wright et al., 2012). These come from a variety of sources, including family, media of all kinds, and school. While our Aotearoa/New Zealand health and physical education curriculum has been praised for its incorporation of more holistic concepts of well-being, including the Māori concept of hauora (incorporating taha tinana, taha wairua, taha hinengaro, and taha whānau – or physical, spiritual, mental and social aspects of health); what this looks like in practice, within the broader social and political context, is less clear cut (Fitzpatrick & Burrows, 2017). Rather, in New Zealand schools (and wider society) an aspect of 'health' given particular attention is the production of a healthy body through individual lifestyle (eating and exercise) behaviours (Burrows & Wright, 2007). This focus echoes a neoliberal focus on 'healthism' (Crawford, 2006) - that is, a focus on *doing* health through enacting healthy lifestyle choices as an individual *moral* responsibility.

Since the early 2000s, obesity has been seen as a health 'crisis' (Campos et al., 2005; Gard & Wright, 2005), and received a significant amount of attention in New Zealand and elsewhere, seemingly overshadowing other aspects of well-being. This concern remains high on the public agenda (with releases from the government such as: *Food Industry Asked to Step up Fight against Obesity*, 2019; *Work Continues to Reduce Childhood Obesity*, 2016), despite critical commentators arguing that this phenomenon of increasing population body weights has already come to an end (Gard, 2011). Within this on-going 'crisis', children are seen as a key site for intervention, considered both particularly 'at risk' and an effective site for making change and creating healthy futures (Beausoleil, 2008; Burrows et al., 2009, 2018; Burrows & Wright, 2007; Wright et al., 2012). This focus on combatting obesity has therefore encouraged a particular approach to

health education; one characterised by simplistic messages about 'good' and 'bad' food, the importance of vigorous physical exercise for fitness, and which (with varying degrees of intentionality) relegates larger bodies as the unhealthy 'other' (Burrows & Wright, 2007; Wright et al., 2012) .

While often treated separately in practice (within the education context) and in the literature, alongside obesity are other concerns about children's bodies, including firstly body image and (dis)satisfaction (and in turn its relationship with self-esteem and body management practices such as disordered eating) (Griffiths et al., 2010, 2010; Markula et al., 2008), and secondly body-related stigmatisation (including what has been variously called 'weight bias' and 'fat stigma') (e.g. Ata & Thompson, 2010; Puhl & Heuer, 2010; Puhl & Latner, 2007). While the challenge of obesity has increased attention on children's bodies and behaviours, it has generally remained separated from these other concerns, with health promotion programmes aimed at one aspect (e.g. obesity) or another (e.g. body image), but rarely combined (Bray et al., 2018). However, in doing this we run the risk of sending contradictory messages to children. As Neumark-Sztainer and colleagues (Bucchianeri & Neumark-Sztainer, 2014; Neumark-Sztainer, 2005, 2012; Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2006) have argued, the approaches generally taken to these issues can at times appear to be in direct conflict with each other. When we emphasise a negative approach to body weight in terms of health, highlighting fatness as 'a problem', we risk undermining any positive body acceptance messages. With such confusing and contradictory goals we run the risk of causing harm, despite our best intentions (O'Dea, 2005). Below I explore each of these areas in the literature in more detail, before considering how they fit together in the current research to make up my focus on 'healthy bodies'.

Healthism, obesity literature and a healthy weight discourse

Crawford (1980, 2006) outlined a shift in understandings of health from the mid 1970s, using the term 'healthism' to describe how health had come to be increasingly understood in relation to personal responsibility, part of being a responsible citizen, and to be reified in such a way as to become a major marker of agency and identity. Here then, health becomes a moral imperative, a "duty to stay well" (Turrini, 2015, p. 22). Beyond simply avoiding disease, this extends to wellness promotion and optimisation,

and a focus on lifestyle, including self- and body- control, expanding the boundaries beyond what would traditionally have been associated with 'health' at all (Cheek, 2008; Turrini, 2015). Through the 2000s and beyond we have seen a continuation of this social construct, evolving and refracting alongside new technologies and social developments, and within different (micro)cultures (See for example: Brown, 2017; Cheek, 2008; Clark, 2018; J. Evans, Rich, et al., 2008; Johnson et al., 2013; Lee & Macdonald, 2010; Riley & Evans, 2018; Robson et al., 2022; Shea & Beausoleil, 2012; Wright et al., 2006; Wright & Burrows, 2004), and the on-going "consolidation of health as one of the guiding mantras of both governments and individuals, paradoxically and simultaneously both a collective and individual responsibility and desire" (Cheek, 2008, p. 974). In line with this trend, a focus on body work and a preoccupation with body size/weight has become normalised and taken-for-granted in how we understand 'health' (Cheek, 2008; Gard & Wright, 2005; Markula et al., 2008; Riley & Evans, 2018; Wright & Harwood, 2009).

Dominant understandings of health have become intertwined with *looking* – at bodies and behaviours (Burrows, 2008; Harwood, 2012; Jutel & Buetow, 2007), and with widespread concerns about obesity there is often a particular focus on health behaviours *to avoid fatness*, to the point that 'healthy weight' becomes the primary goal and success measure of health promotion and interventions. In doing so it subsumes other possible measures of 'health', whether these be physical (such as more direct measurement of metabolic activity) or more holistic (including social, emotional, or spiritual as well as physical outcomes). These messages are often characterised by simplicity, for example around certain foods as 'good'/'bad' or 'healthy'/'unhealthy', as well as energy in/energy out equations: a simplicity that children are picking up, as evidenced by a range of qualitative research with children of a variety of ages (Burrows & Wright, 2007; D. Powell & Fitzpatrick, 2013; Welch et al., 2012). Even when some of the health messages being promoted at a policy level offer a more complex picture of health, these complexities are often lost in translation, from how they are interpreted by individual teachers, to the limits and challenges of an overstretched curriculum (Fitzpatrick & Burrows, 2017). Additionally, recent authors have highlighted a tendency for "lifestyle drift", where even when interventions and social marketing strategies may initially acknowledge wider social

factors, they seem to inevitably return to a focus on individual behaviour change (Powell et al., 2017; Warin, 2021).

Recent studies in New Zealand and elsewhere have highlighted how, within the context of on-going concern about obesity, children have become a target for neoliberal messages about becoming healthy, focused on eating 'good' foods and being physically active, that tend to incorporate particular notions of the healthy body (Burrows & Wright, 2007; Evans & Rich, 2011; Wright et al., 2012). Such a focus in schools is driven by a deep concern about 'obesity', and particularly what childhood obesity might mean for the future of this young generation. However, critical commentators from a variety of fields have drawn attention to a number of problematic aspects of this sort of dominant 'obesity discourse' and how it is being taken up, including both a critique of the scientific claims being made about obesity and the social, psychological and health effects of obesity discourse (e.g. Bacon & Aphramor, 2011; Campos, Saguy, Ernsberger, Oliver, & Gaesser, 2005; Evans, Rich, Davies, & Allwood, 2008; Gard & Wright, 2005; Tischner, 2013). In comparison to the certainty with which obesity is often talked about, the literature is characterised by complexity and uncertainty, including for example around the meaning of the epidemiological data (e.g. the notion that obesity is escalating at 'epidemic' proportions), the causes and consequences of fatness (including its association with various non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, and even cancer), as well as whether it is possible to make people thin and whether or not this improves their health.

Despite the taken-for-granted assumptions about fatness in our culture, few interventions show reliable, long-term success at getting rid of people's body fat, nor much evidence that doing so would reduce any associated health risks (Campos, 2004; Gard & Wright, 2005). In contrast, a body of research suggests that it *is* possible to be fat, fit and healthy, and that lifestyle changes (healthy eating and physical activity) as long as they are not taken to extremes, are beneficial for people's health *irrespective of whether or how much weight is lost*. In contrast, many body management practices aimed at combatting fatness or obesity

such as ‘yo yo dieting’ (that is, the cycles of weight loss and weight gain common for those who attempt to lose weight by dieting), may lead to overall weight gain and worse health outcomes (for outlines of some of these critiques see for example Campos, 2004; Campos, Saguy, Ernsberger, Oliver, & Gaesser, 2005; Gard & Wright, 2005; Monaghan, 2005; Rich, Monaghan, & Aphramor, 2010). It has also been suggested that just as concern about the ‘obesity epidemic’ was ramping up, the phenomena itself was dying down (Gard, 2011). Alongside the debate around the causes and consequences of obesity, there is also concern about the social and psychological effects of obesity discourse and a weight-focused approach. A variety of critical scholars from around the world have highlighted the moral and political aspects of this kind of ‘fat panic’, as well as its dangers (Beausoleil, 2008; J. Evans, Rich, et al., 2008; Gard & Wright, 2001; Monaghan et al., 2013; Rich & Evans, 2005; Tischner & Malson, 2011). Of particular relevance here, we run the risk of individualising complex social-structural issues, as well as contributing to harmful mental health outcomes, encouraging unhealthful body management practices, and increasing body-based stigmatisation.

In light of this critique then, it is important to consider our response to obesity as an issue not just in relation to health education around lifestyle choices, but also in relation to the literature on both weight-related stigmatisation, and body image issues. That is, how does the way we understand and talk about weight/fat and health (as well as and in relation to morality, food, fitness and gender) affect people’s lives, activities, relationships and identities?

Fat stigma, discrimination and body-based harassment

To begin with, by focusing on body weights and shapes, there is a risk of increasing the stigmatisation of ‘fat’ with enormous potential for harm. Bodies are important aspects of our selves, shaped by a complex intermixing of biology, personhood and the social and physical environments within which they exist. They are also the most visible part of what we present to the world, and as such are ‘read’ by the people around us to infer characteristics and identities, who we ‘are’. Body weight or fatness, then, becomes a very visible marker of cultural undesirability, reinforced by healthist notions of obesity, including its causes and consequences. Framed within neoliberal understandings of personal responsibility, fatness is seen as visible

proof of failure, blamed on fat people's own choices and actions (Pausé, 2017). These dominant constructions of fat align it with un-healthiness, laziness, gluttony, immorality, and unattractiveness; in contrast, in Western societies, thin bodies (particularly for women) are read as a sign of healthfulness, beauty, success and control. These characteristics become automatic assumptions in the way we interpret bodies as fat or non-fat. As Murray (2005) argues, "we exist in a culture of a negative collective 'knowingness' about fatness…. we have a learned negative response to fat bodies, and their aesthetic transgressions" (p.154). While negative social understandings of fat may be old, this 'knowingness' is given particular power by the 'obesity epidemic' and the larger context of neo-liberalism and 'healthism'. Fat bodies then are 'read' as signs of 'failure' to make the 'simple' and 'correct' choices advocated in obesity discourse, and seen as an economic risk/burden to society (Gard & Wright, 2005). This conflation of issues around weight, health, beauty and morality has a number of detrimental effects, including the stigmatisation and marginalisation of fat individuals across the world, at all ages, and over a wide variety of domains (Pausé, 2017).

Such 'knowingness' has a huge effect on the lives of fat people. This includes both blatant and subtle stigmatisation, as well as structural inequalities. Further for fat people it can encourage complex relationships with their own bodies. As Pausé (2017) argues, it is not just non-fat people that hold stigmatising attitudes towards fatness; rather "everyone grows up internalizing the fat hating attitudes that are pervasive across the globe" (p. 511). Qualitative studies with 'large' women have highlighted how fatness can become a hyper-visible and dominating identity, "a major marker of place and power" (Rice, 2007, p. 167), combining with other lines of difference to increase feelings of 'otherness' and shame, and obscuring other positive identities, characteristics, abilities and aspirations. Similarly, Tischner and Malson (2008) found 'large' women reported feeling a constant surveillance, under which large bodies are "constructed as better hidden/not to be seen" (p.265), as well as not fitting normative rules or even the physical environment (such as seats on buses or planes). As various authors note (J. Evans, 2003; Gard & Wright, 2001), unlike many other types of stigma and group stereotyping (such as racism and sexism) which have become 'politically incorrect', anti-fat sentiments are still largely seen as acceptable and even

sometimes encouraged. The construction of fat as modifiable and a direct cause of death and disease gives permission, and even demands, surveillance and 'policing' of fat bodies, seen as 'encouragement' to help people start making the steps for change. Even public health campaigns often make use of stigmatising portrayals of fatness, despite the dubious ethics of doing so (O'Dea, 2005; Pausé, 2017; Puhl & Heuer, 2010).

Weight bias, fat stigma and weight based discrimination has been extensively researched in a variety of ways, and translates into inequities across many aspects of people's lives, including in employment, health-care, and educational settings, as well as interpersonal relationships and the media (Pausé, 2017; Puhl & Heuer, 2009). That is, for fat people it is a part of all their relationships, from friends and family, to colleagues, to social opportunities and income; and increases with size so that "the fatter you are the more stigma you experience" (Pausé, 2017, p. 511). Weight bias is similarly prevalent for children, including from peers, parents and teachers (Pont et al., 2017; Puhl & Latner, 2007), and has been found internationally to be the most common reason for bullying among youth (Puhl et al., 2016). In a classic study, Richardson and colleagues (Richardson et al., 1961) got children to rank six pictures, including images of children with various disabilities (e.g. being in a wheelchair, having an amputated hand, or facial disfigurement) as well as a 'normal' weight and 'overweight' child. The overweight child was ranked last and rated as least likable. Repetitions of this and similar studies suggest that these kinds of anti-fat attitudes may have become stronger over the last fifty years (Andreyeva et al., 2008; Latner & Stunkard, 2003); are present for both girls and boys from a young age (Spiel et al., 2012), and apply to both human and non-human figures (Marx et al., 2019). Likewise, utilising an attitudinal rating scale with young adults in the US, Ambwani et al. (2014) found that over 90% endorsed at least one negative attitude; while a third agreed that "one of the worst things that could happen to a person would be for him to become obese" (p. 368). While determining specific prevalence rates is difficult due to the diverse types of bias and how it has been measured, research overseas suggests that weight bias is a common experience for overweight youths (Puhl et al., 2016; Puhl & Latner, 2007). Similarly, a survey with children and adolescents across four New Zealand primary and secondary schools suggested that a large number of children experience types of weight bias,

for example reporting that they have been told by somebody that they were fat or overweight (25-62% varying by age group) or have been bullied about their weight (34- 50% depending on age group) (Burrows, 2008, p. 32).

Such weight stigmatisation has a number of damaging effects, including on both mental and physical health. The effects of stress, stigma and discrimination on marginalised groups are well researched, and apply to fat people also, affecting metabolic health (such as blood pressure and cortisol levels), as well as psychosocial outcomes (Pausé, 2017). For example research suggests that higher weight children and teens are more likely to suffer from social isolation, lower self-esteem and body image, depression, anxiety, to be bullied and to be bullies, as well as being at higher risk of suicide (Griffiths et al., 2006; Lumeng et al., 2010; Pont et al., 2017; Puhl & Latner, 2007; Whetstone et al., 2007). Indeed, Puhl and Latner further argue that in terms of overall quality of life, "[a]n alarming finding of this research was that obese children had QOL [quality of life] scores comparable with those of children with cancer" (Puhl & Latner, 2007, p. 567). Further, weight-based discrimination may even negatively impact fat individuals' cardiovascular health, even when weight (BMI) is controlled for (Muennig, 2008; Puhl & Latner, 2007). Alongside these effects, individuals may also attempt to manage weight bias and fat stigma in ways that are less than healthful, including avoiding situations where this is more likely to occur (such as fitness and healthcare settings), as well as extreme body management behaviours, as I discuss below. Body based harassment then is a serious concern for our youth, and one that needs to be considered in the way we promote health to children from a young age.

Body image, self-esteem and body-management

In an understanding of obesity as a looming individual and social health crisis, governed by a simple energy equation, a range of behaviours are encouraged: from watching our waist circumference and frequent use of bathroom scales to monitor our weight, to taking offensive steps such as dieting (limiting food intake or abstaining from particular kinds of foods), 'calorie counting', use of various pharmaceutical or 'fitness' products, 'buffing up' and 'working out' at the gym, and even weight loss surgery (from liposuction to

gastric bypass surgery). These pressures are clearly gendered, putting different pressures on women and men. Feminist critiques of the body work required of women are long standing (e.g. Bartky, 1988; Bordo, 1993; Bordo & Heywood, 2004; Duncan, 1994; Lupton, 1996; Markula, 1995; Tischner & Malson, 2011). The slender feminine ideal has evolved over time to a more complex one; yet being (appropriately) skinny (that is neither fat nor extremely thin) remains a strong imperative in Westernised societies, and one with a host of social ramifications, a marker of a range of achievements from health and beauty, to success and control (Markula et al., 2008). As Markula (1995) argued, the feminine ideal has become one of contradictions: "firm but shapely, fit but sexy, strong but thin" (p. 424). Additionally, healthism interacts with a 'postfeminist sensibility' in contradictory ways: simultaneously making use of feminist critiques while refuting feminism, where body work practices such as dieting and food restriction for example are rebranded into empowerment and pleasure in managing the self and engaging in 'healthy' practices (Riley & Evans, 2018). At the same time as Western culture has become increasingly concerned with an 'obesity epidemic', "so-called eating disorders, body image concerns and extreme dieting and body management practices are apparently increasing" (Markula et al., 2008, p. 3).

While some level of these practices may be healthful, for example 'eating well' and 'being active' are widely considered positive practices, it becomes clear that that there is a discursive continuity between health promotion messages driven by obesity discourse, and practices that are far from healthy. For example, in relation to eating, whether the focus is on nutrition or on *fat-avoidance* becomes ambiguous when driven by obesity discourse. Here the line between 'healthy eating' and 'dieting', with associated restriction and weight-loss goals, becomes blurred. At their extremes, unhealthful eating practices can turn into eating disorders such as Bulimia and Anorexia Nervosa. While it would certainly be imprudent to over-simplify the aetiology of eating disorders solely to social factors such as obesity discourse and the thin ideal, neither is an explanation of individual dysfunction sufficient. Further it is important to recognise that a continuity of logic can be found between such practices and public health messages driven by obesity discourse, where an imperative for a slender body encourages careful regulation of energy input and output. For example, in their examination of bulimia, Burns and Gavey (2004, 2008) noted a sometimes paradoxical adherence to

obesity discourse where being slim was seen as a sign of health, in spite of the 'disordered' body management practices that were used to achieve it. That is, the 'look' of health (i.e. a slender, athletic and attractive body) appeared to be more important than 'being healthy', with outwardly 'unhealthy' behaviours, such as smoking and purging, justified as 'compensatory' practices necessary to eradicate unwanted calories and therefore stave off fat. Further, as Riley and Evans (2018) argue, within healthism and a postfeminist sensibility, transformative bodywork comes to be portrayed and understood through discourses of empowerment, pleasure and fun, masking the work and unpleasantness that may be involved.

Likewise, while being active is considered good for the body, peoples' engagement with exercise, when enmeshed within obesity discourse, can also become problematic in a number of ways. Within obesity discourse, not only is thinness conflated with being healthy but with being fit and athletic. In contrast fat is seen as indicative of being unfit and lazy (Evans, 2003; Gard & Wright, 2005; Rice, 2007). By positioning 'fitness' and 'fatness' in opposition, an important understanding of the benefits of physical activity *irrespective of weight* may be lost. Within such a construction fat individuals are positioned as unable before they even start to engage in exercise, suffer stigmatization in exercise contexts that can make it difficult or unappealing, may give up due to perceived 'failure' if exercise doesn't appear to result in the desired body changes, or may push themselves to unhealthy extremes. Similarly, 'thin' individuals may be encouraged to engage in exercise in ways that can be obsessive and unhealthy, or to eschew exercise as unnecessary as society already views them as 'slim and healthy' (Mansfield, 2010; Markula, 1995; Markula et al., 2008; Mutrie & Choi, 2000).

It is important to note that, like with eating, 'working out' for the purposes of body management involves different requirements to those necessary for health. Further, while exercise has been shown to have numerous positive effects for the body, this too can be taken to unhealthy extremes. For example, Zanker and Gard (2008) explain using the ethnographic study of 'Lindsay' (a long distance runner with symptoms of anorexia nervosa as well as 'over-exercising') how exercise and fitness can come to constitute a significant

part of someone's life and identity in ways that while sometimes nurturing can also be harmful, an "ever-vigilant taskmaster" (p. 56). As with the eating disorders described above, it is the continuity with imperatives of obesity discourse in health and physical education (and wider public health messages) that Zanker and Gard argue is particularly striking and dangerous. In Lindsay's stories, the firm belief that fitness equals moral superiority as well as health is clear, used as a defence against repeated illness and bodily-breakdown, as well as the views of those around her that her engagement with sport and exercise is extreme and damaging.

Body dissatisfaction is not just a concern for overweight children, although they may be particularly vulnerable; rather a focus on bodily appearance, a *fear* of fat, and narrow delineations of what is considered 'healthy' and 'normal' mean that children (like adults) of many shapes and sizes are susceptible to body dissatisfaction and potentially turning to body management practices that can be far from healthful. For example, research also suggests that there is a group of 'thin' or 'normal' weight girls who are also particularly vulnerable to body dissatisfaction even from a young age (see for example Tremblay, Lovsin, Zecevic, & Larivière, 2011). Working with older youths, Evans et al. (2008) bring together scholarship on obesity discourse, body image, eating disorders and educational practices in their research with young women with anorexia nervosa or bulimia. It becomes clear in their research that the implications they are exploring go beyond those with eating disorders; rather they note that "the actions and views of these young people who have taken 'disordered eating' to an extreme throw into sharp relief aspects of schooling, culture and society that are problematic for many other children and young people, not just 'the vulnerable few'" (Evans et al., 2008, pp. 3–4).

A related issue then is the concern in the literature that body dissatisfaction and body management behaviours have become more common (Bucchianeri et al., 2013; Dion et al., 2016; Irving & Neumark-Sztainer, 2002), and in younger children than previously thought (Damiano et al., 2015; Ricciardelli & McCabe, 2001); yet have remained relatively understudied in the public health arena (Bucchianeri & Neumark-Sztainer, 2014). For example, in their review of the literature on children 6-11 years old Ricciadelli

and McCabe argue that between 28-55% of girls, and 17-30% of boys desire to be thinner; while on the opposite end 4-18% of girls, and 13-48% boys desire a larger/broader body size. In terms of body management behaviours, estimates range from 20- 55.6% for dieting to lose weight, approximately 43% report exercising to lose weight, and fewer (6.5% of girls and 14.2% of boys) report binge eating or self-induced vomiting (1.8% of girls and 0.7% of boys) (Maloney et al., 1989, as cited in Ricciadelli & McCabe, 2001). Likewise, the responses to questions about weight and body (dis)satisfaction reported by Burrows (2008) from their survey of New Zealand children and adolescents suggests quite a high percentage of young people, even at primary school, report some body and weight concerns; for example 44% of the primary school students, and 67% of the secondary students responded that they only 'sometimes' or 'rarely' felt good about their bodies, with marked gender differences. Further, of the primary school cohort 38% of boys and 42% of girls, and of the secondary cohort 30% of boys and 62% of girls, responded that they had at some time thought they needed to be thinner. Research has explored a variety of inter-related elements to the development of body dissatisfaction and body management behaviours, including larger body size, perfectionism, internalisation of appearance ideals, exposure to media, parental and peer influences (Dohnt & Tiggemann, 2006; Evans et al., 2013; McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2005; Paxton et al., 2006; Tatangelo et al., 2018).

Body dissatisfaction trajectories over the lifespan are not well understood, but have been found to increase over adolescence and early adulthood (Bucchianeri et al., 2013), and to remain relatively stable (Tiggemann, 2004; Wang et al., 2019). While there is some evidence of weight concerns and body dissatisfaction even for pre-schoolers, the early school years seem to be a key time. For example, around six or seven years old seems to be when associations between sociocultural influences and body dissatisfaction begin to strengthen for young girls (Dohnt & Tiggemann, 2006; Hayes & Tantleff-Dunn, 2010; Heron et al., 2013). Longitudinal research has suggested that girls' body dissatisfaction and weight concerns at younger ages are predictive of body dissatisfaction and weight concerns in late childhood, as well as increased dietary restraint and maladaptive eating attitudes (Davison, Markey & Birch, 2003), paralleling studies with older adolescents that have found links between recurrent body dissatisfaction during

adolescence and elevated symptoms of depression and disordered eating in late adolescence and early adulthood (Ohring et al., 2002). Likewise, qualitative research has drawn attention to similar concerns. Rice (2007) for example explores the consequences of messages around fitness and fatness received in childhood in the life stories of Canadian women, and in particular how these affected their emerging social identities, including their acquisition of gender identities, as well as their on-going engagement with eating and exercise.

It is important to note that while research on body image and dissatisfaction has tended to focus on women and girls, research suggests that men and boys too are subject to particular concerns and pressures about the body. Within the context of the 'obesity epidemic' fat is constructed as a danger to 'everyone everywhere' (Gard & Wright, 2005); and fear of fat has become increasingly important for men also, both aesthetically and as part of the moral health imperatives that require one to 'look after' one's health (and not be a 'burden' on society) to be a 'good' citizen. While the pressures this puts on men and boys are qualitatively different, researchers have highlighted the need to explore what this means for how masculinities are negotiated in relation to body size and body management behaviours (Gill, 2007; Monaghan, 2007; Monaghan & Malson, 2013). Unsurprisingly then, studies have found body dissatisfaction in a noteworthy number of boys and men, including the very young (Muise et al., 2003), although specific concerns may vary across the lifespan (McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2004). The presence of disordered eating and exercise behaviours was found to be more apparent when less stringent criteria (than the DSM-IV classifications) are used (Muise et al., 2003) and when body concerns relating specifically to dominant constructions of masculinity are also examined. For example Neumark-Sztainer et al. (2006) argue that when notions of 'disordered' eating and exercise are extended to those aimed at achieving a large (non-fat) muscular body (masculine ideal), as well as a small thin one (feminine ideal), similar levels are apparent in boys to those of body image and eating disorders in girls. Likewise, others have found young boys to be particularly invested in muscularity, strength and athleticism, as well as non-fatness (McLean et al., 2018;

Tatangelo et al., 2018). Body image, size and weight concerns for boys and men are also likely to be accompanied by body management behaviours, including following rigid rules about eating and exercise, binge-eating, vomiting, substance (ab)use, 'over-exercising' and extreme use of dietary supplements and drugs to 'bulk up' (Hillgrove, 2014; O'Dea & Abraham, 2002; Tatangelo et al., 2018). Such body work to achieve the desired body for men may derive from similar social pressures of bodily surveillance and control to those affecting women, although more research needs to be conducted to explore these gendered pathways (Gill, 2007; McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2004). Finally, certain populations may be particularly 'at risk', for example boys with a higher BMI and those who identify as homosexual or bisexual (Muise et al., 2003), highlighting the importance of intersectionality.

Bringing it together: Healthy body messages

Concerns about the 'thin ideal' and body image issues, particularly for girls and women, are longstanding. However, these concerns seem to have taken a backseat to (or fail to be integrated with) policies combatting the apparent looming threat of obesity. There has been a tendency for the fields of body image and eating disorder prevention to remain separate, despite the potential for cross-over, as well as danger of unintended effects. Indeed, while there is sympathy for the stigmatisation of overweight children, the power of obesity discourse means there is also a tendency to question whether stigma might actually be acceptable or even helpful in motivating weight loss. However, there is no evidence that this is the case (Puhl & Latner, 2007), nor as Puhl and Latner contend, would this make it acceptable. As O'Dea (2005) has argued, it is important for health interventions to take a step back and consider the primary objective to first, 'do no harm'. Yet anti-obesity interventions often involve the potential for a number of unintended consequences, from further stigmatization, prejudice and discrimination of fat individuals; increasing marginalisation of already vulnerable groups; victim-blaming; misinformation; increasing body dissatisfaction; encouraging avoidance of important services such as healthcare; to inadvertently encouraging unhealthful body management practices such as dieting and other weight-loss techniques. While some of these arguments are almost twenty years old, they remain important and an on-going

challenge. More recently, for example, Warin and others have highlighted the on-going "'gentle invisible' violence of obesity prevention" programmes in Australia, which despite "position[ing] themselves as well intentioned can reproduce forms of slow and symbolic violence through pedagogic care" (Warin, 2020, p. 663). This includes continuing to push a 'one-size-fits-all' approach that ignores the social gradient in obesity statistics (Warin et al., 2019), and the complexities of families' lives and socio-economic contexts (Graham et al., 2018; Throsby, 2018; Warin, 2021; Warin et al., 2019).

Lauded as ahead of its time, the New Zealand HPE curriculum is centred around a notion of 'well-being' that foregrounds holistic understandings of health, including 'hauora' (a Māori perspective that highlights mental and emotional, social and spiritual, as well as physical dimensions as pillars of health), as well as teaching children to be critical health consumers who can reflect on, integrate, and take action from health information (Burrows & Wright, 2004, 2007; Fitzpatrick & Burrows, 2017). However, the avowedly holistic and critical nature of the NZ HPE curriculum sits in tension with other influences, including the wider context of obesity concerns, government agendas and the tendency of public health messages to focus on simplicity (Fitzpatrick & Burrows, 2017), as well as their interpretation by particular teachers in individual school contexts (Burrows & McCormack, 2012).

Likewise, as Burrows and Wright (2007) argued:

> in the context of the obesity epidemic, much of the potential this curriculum yields in terms of regarding children as social actors is diluted… despite an avowedly more 'holistic' notion of what health entails, in an 'obesity' laden environment, much of the focus in schooling remains on practices that impact on physical health–specifically on eating and physical exercise. (Burrows & Wright, 2007, p. 88)

I have argued here that imperatives to 'eat well' and 'exercise' enmeshed in obesity discourse are not necessarily simple or healthy in the way they are taken up in the everyday lives of individuals. Rather, at its extremes, obesity discourse encourages embodied relationships characterised by guilt and anxiety as well as obsessive and potentially damaging 'control' of diet and exercise. In relation to the ongoing pressure of these messages in children's lives, both at home and at school, then, such messages seem to set children

up to have unrealistic and potentially damaging expectations about bodies and health with harmful effects for how they might engage with food, physical activity and their own and others' bodies (Burrows, 2010b; Burrows et al., 2002). As Burrows and Wright argued:

> The sheer volume and scope of resources being applied to schools provides children with a wealth of information and knowledge about their own and others' health, yet the nature of that information is such that it tends to close down rather than open up possibilities for young children to think critically and weigh up options for themselves relevant to their particular life circumstances. (Burrows & Wright, 2007, p. 94)

A range of strategies have been mobilised in schools including banning particular foods and drinks from school cafeterias, parental education attempts, introducing 'fitness' activities, making use of a variety of (often commercially sponsored) nutrition resources, and surveillance of children's lunchboxes (Maher et al., 2020; Pluim et al., 2018; D. Powell & Fitzpatrick, 2013; D. Powell & Pluim, 2020; Wright et al., 2012). Attempts to mobilise children as health advocates or 'agents of change' within the family, through information about healthy eating at schools, put increasing pressure on children and families (Burrows, 2017, 2021). However, despite this focus, recent projects that focused on talking to families in NZ and Australia have found that families experience relatively little of this information making it home; rather children see their family as primary sources of expertise on health and food (Burrows, 2021; Maher et al., 2020). School messages about health and bodies are often experienced by children and their families as contradictory, and even sometimes hypocritical, as well as failing to align with the more relational nature of family food practices (Burrows, 2017; Lindsay et al., 2021; Maher et al., 2020). For example Maher et al argue that while school messages are often instrumental and compartmentalised, with specific items labelled as healthy or unhealthy, this is often overshadowed for children by rules and regulations about where and when eating occurs, what foods are 'allowed', and prohibitions against sharing food; as well as in stark contrast to other school policies, for example around fundraising (Maher et al., 2020). In contrast, families tend to make decisions about food in context, balancing "pragmatism, pleasure and health, where relationships and care are at the centre" (Maher et al., 2020, p. 87). Likewise, Burrows talks about how families weave together knowledge from different sources, alongside practicalities such as the cost and availability of foods, children's allergies, likes and dislikes, commitments to sustainability, as well as familial

rituals and traditions, cultural and religious practices; food knowledge then “assembled in ways that made sense for each family’s life” (Burrows, 2021, p. 240). Research talking to children and families about these clashes between school and home, has found a range of reactions from viewing school rules and policies as minor annoyances, to a source of a variety of unintended negative emotional consequences for children and their families (Burrows, 2021; Maher et al., 2020; Tanner et al., 2019). For example, Tanner et al (2019) show how narrow Anglo-Western ideas of what constitutes ‘healthy food’, rigidity around what and how food is consumed at school, and how it can be presented (e.g. ‘nude food’) “can produce feelings of frustration, concern, worry, upset and anger for families, and feelings of worry, embarrassment, fear and shame for children” (p.21), including further marginalising those from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Children’s media and picture books

Given the young age that anti-fat attitudes and body dissatisfaction appear to develop, as well as the consistent and simplistic ways that even young children are engaging with obesity discourse, further exploration of what messages are being directed at very young children and how they are engaging with these messages seems crucial.

While concern about (and study of) health and body representations in popular visual media such as television, movies and magazines are widespread (e.g. Dohnt & Tiggemann, 2006; Greenberg, Eastin, Hofschire, Lachlan, & Brownell, 2003; Hargreaves & Tiggemann, 2004; Himes & Thompson, 2007; McGladrey, 2013; Northup & Liebler, 2010; Veldhuis, Konijn, & Seidell, 2014), these messages in picture books have been relatively understudied. Yet stories generally and picture books in particular are an important and useful window into social norms and expectations; a way that children learn what is expected and valued in society from a young age; and so form part of the mosaic of understanding that contributes to children’s formation of self-image and identity as well as understanding of the world more broadly. A wide variety of research has examined the representations of gender in picture books, for

example, and potential effects of this (see for example Ashton, 1983; Davies, 1989; Diekman & Murnen, 2004; Hamilton, Anderson, Broaddus, & Young, 2006; McCabe, Fairchild, Grauerholz, Pescosolido, & Tope, 2011; Parsons, 2004; Weitzman, Eifler, Hokada, & Ross, 1972). In arguing that such inequitable representations *matter*, Hamilton et al (2006) note that experimental research aligns with the 'common-sense' understandings of parents (and others), strongly suggesting that gender bias in picture books reinforces and strengthens children's own gender biases, with measurable effects on subsequent attitudes, toy and activity choices, and occupational interests.

Similar research has been conducted in relation to other social groups, including along the lines of age (Crawford & Bhattacharya, 2014; Hollis-Sawyer & Cuevas, 2013), ethnicity (Mendoza & Reese, 2001), sexuality (Flanagan, 2008; Kelly, 2012; Sunderland & McGlashan, 2013), and characteristics such as deafness (Golos & Moses, 2013) and disability (Matthews, 2009). While little research has been conducted to date on representations of body shape/size in picture books, I argue this too could be usefully subjected to a similar examination. Like all of these groups, representations of body diversity are political, and are an issue of social justice, given (as discussed above) the harms being caused by weight bias, stigma, and discrimination and the prevalence of body dissatisfaction.

Body messages and weight stigma

Appearance messages are common in a wide variety of media, including the "what is beautiful is good" phenomenon (Dion, Berscheid & Walster, 1972, as cited by Herbozo et al, 2004, p.23). That is, there is a tendency for 'good guys' to be represented as physically attractive, while 'bad guys' are often unattractive and otherwise physically 'deviant' from currently accepted social 'ideals', their moral deviance represented through their physical appearance- their bodies. One of the ways this manifests is through weight stigma. This includes larger bodies being under-represented, as well as portrayed in negative and stereotypical ways. While body weight and attractiveness are long-standing points of focus in media, the widespread attention given to concerns about the 'obesity epidemic', particularly in the 1990s and 2000s, provoked a proliferation of particular representations of fat bodies in popular media, "as grotesque, uncontained,

destined for ill-health and an early death, and a burden on the public purse" (Lupton, 2017, p. 120). For example, fat people are widely stigmatised in news content, including the types of shots and angles used as well as the activities engaged in (Puhl et al., 2013). 'Obesity' is regularly symbolised by images of what Charlotte Cooper coined "headless fatties" (Cooper, 2007), eating takeout or pictured in otherwise unflattering and inactive ways.

Likewise, research on popular media representations of body size have found relationships with a variety of aspects, from characters' gender, age, height and ethnicity, to their representation as attractive or unattractive, to the kinds of behaviours they engage in and the kinds of storylines they are involved in. There is also a tendency to under-represent body sizes/shapes that do not fit into (gendered) body 'ideals': not unlike what in relation to gender has been termed the "symbolic annihilation" of women in media. These kind of issues with the representation of larger body sizes have been found across a range of media, from magazines (Malkin et al., 1999; Tiggemann, 2003), to music videos (Borzekowski et al., 2000), to films and television (Eisenberg et al., 2015; Fouts & Burggraf, 1999; Fouts & Vaughan, 2002; Greenberg et al., 2003; Himes & Thompson, 2007; Robinson et al., 2008), to newer media forms such as YouTube and Twitter (Hussin et al., 2011; Lydecker et al., 2016; Yoo & Kim, 2012); and has been found to be true for media aimed at children as well as adults (Ata & Thompson, 2010; Klein & Shiffman, 2005; Northup & Liebler, 2010).

In their review of fat stigma in children's media, Ata and Thompson (2010) note that movies and animated cartoons were particularly likely to have fewer fat or overweight characters, and for these to be portrayed in negative ways; while children's books and situational comedies demonstrated these trends to a lesser extent (though with high variance between individual examples of these media). In Klein and Shiffman (2005)'s analysis of children's animated cartoons, they note that over the past several decades, 'underweight' characters have become more common, while 'overweight' characters have reduced in frequency. Consistent with the 'what is beautiful is good' stereotype, overweight characters were more likely to be represented as unattractive as well as in a range of other negative ways: with below average

physiques, to have below average intelligence, and to be less happy, energetic and loving. There was also a gendered effect, where female characters were more than four times as likely to be ‘underweight’, while males were nearly twice as likely to be ‘overweight’. Explorations of the effects of media exposure on fat stereotyping by children suggest some relationship (Latner et al., 2007), alongside factors such as parental beliefs, and self-image, including perceived body size (Holub, 2008; Holub et al., 2011; Spiel et al., 2012).

While issues around physical attractiveness, body size, and body image have been extensively studied, very few studies have examined body size in relation to children’s literature or picture books specifically. Interestingly, two studies that did look at picture books found relatively few negative messages about food, eating or body size (Byrne & Nitzke, 2000; Herbozo, Tantleff-Dunn, Gokee-Larose, & Thompson, 2004). Indeed Herbozo et al (2004) found that under 10% of the books in their sample (compared with around 70% of the films) included specific body related messages according to their coding framework. Messages about obesity were a bit more common, occurring in about 20% of the books. While additional research is needed, this initial exploration suggests that picture books may offer a different insight into the range of messages about healthy bodies available to children, and particularly those that offer more (body) positive understandings.

Health messages

Predominantly research that has been done in relation to representations of health in children’s media has focused on specific health messages, including nutrition (Bellows, Spaeth, Lee, & Anderson, 2013; Byrne & Nitzke, 2000; Byrne & Nitzke, 2002; Goldberg, 1992), and physical activity (Jarvis et al., 2014; Knowles et al., 2014; Svendsen, 2012; Taveras et al., 2004). These have generally focused on their use as a tool for encouraging children and/or their parents to get active, eat a balanced diet, and also to try new foods. Additionally, research has tended to involve quantitative methodologies such as content analysis to give broad trends in the kind of messages apparent in children’s books and other media. For example, Turner (2006) conducted a content analysis of a convenience sample of 119 children’s picture books involving health, illness and injury related topics, to aid parents and health professionals who want to select and

provide health related reading materials. This study focused predominantly on messages such as coping with illness and injury; books more generally about health, healthy bodies or healthy lifestyles were relatively few, although this may have been related to the sampling framework used.

Overall there is a dearth of research exploring the nuances of health and body portrayals in media for young children, and especially in picture books.

The Current Study

In the current study, I aim to explore the messages young primary school aged (5-6 years old) children are receiving about ‘healthy bodies’ in New Zealand, and how they are making sense of these messages through their talk. Here notions of body size/shape/weight and health education around healthy lifestyle choices are placed alongside the related issues of body image and body-based stigmatisation: together forming the focus on ‘healthy bodies’. Taking a social constructionist stance, I argue we need to explore the multitude of (often contradictory) messages children are receiving from all around them. Bodies are central to the way we interact with the world, and the meanings we attribute to them are everywhere. Further, even young children are not passive consumers, but actively engaged with their worlds; it is also important, therefore, to explore how children engage with these messages. Here then, I examine the ‘healthy body’ discourses available to children, via a focus on picture books. While, as I have argued, research has often concentrated on newer visual media, such as children’s TV, movies and music videos, I focus here on picture books as a relatively understudied media form, which children engage with from a young age and in both school and home contexts; and potentially one that more often highlights diverse and critical messages about health and bodies. Additionally, by using key picture books identified in this initial analysis in small focus group discussions with young children, this research aims to go deeper into the nuances of meanings in these texts, in interaction with their audience and how they are ‘read’ by children.

Key questions guiding the research include:

1. How are healthy bodies constructed in children’s picture books, and in particular what messages about shape/size, eating, exercise, diversity, body image and gender do they offer in relation to this?
2. How do children read, understand and engage with these messages?
3. What discourses available to children allow them to engage with the complexities of health in ways that encourage critical thinking, self-esteem and are (body) positive?

Theoretical and Methodological roots

Broadly, my research fits within a social constructionist epistemology, taking a critical discursive approach to examine the complexities of how ‘healthy bodies’ are being constructed in both children’s media and in their talk.

My research has two main parts:

1. An analysis of the messages about ‘healthy bodies’ in **picture books** for children.
2. Interviews and small **group discussions** with 5-6 year old children (in groups of 2-3), using a subset of the books analysed in stage one, as well as an unstructured drawing activity, as a focus for discussing health & bodies.

In this chapter, I explore the theoretical underpinnings of the research, before describing the methods used to collect and analyse the data.

Social constructionism and a critical discursive approach

In this research, at an epistemological level I take a social constructionist stance, where truth and meaning are seen as contextual and contested, coming into being through social interaction. Constructionism questions the idea that we can know or observe ‘reality’ directly. Rather, the world is seen as given *meaning* through how it is negotiated between individuals, mediated and even *constructed* through language (Gergen, 1985; Willig, 2013). Here, language is seen as more than just a passive and neutral means for transmitting information. Rather, language is acknowledged to be an important social *practice*. Language is never neutral, but rather does things; and has real world effects. Particular constructions of health, for example, have implications for how we understand and ‘do’ health (Crawford, 2006). Likewise, our understandings of healthy bodies, and of ourselves as healthy or not, arise from social interaction, within particular social and cultural worlds, and have follow on effects for how we engage with the world (Lyons & Chamberlain, 2006). In this sense, the ways in which we understand the world are “social

artifacts" (Gergen, 1985, p. 267), which are socially and culturally situated, and actively contested in interactions; "Knowledge… is something people do together" (Gergen, 1985, p. 270).

In line with this stance, Potter and Wetherell (1995) and Parker (1990, 2005) pioneered a discursive approach in psychology, which focuses on exploring the ways language is used in interactions to construct particular versions of the world. Here the focus is on 'discourses', coherent sets of meanings, which construct people and objects in particular ways (Parker, 1990). Based on the works of these writers, two different schools of Discourse Analysis (DA) in psychology are often differentiated, namely Discursive Psychology, and Foucauldian or Critical Discourse Analysis. Discursive Psychology, based on the work of Potter and Wetherell (1995), tends to focus more at a micro level, exploring how a speaker or writer uses discourse within a particular context to fulfil certain social actions. In contrast, a Critical Discourse Analysis approach focuses more on the broader social functioning of discourses, and on the ways in which language functions in relation to power (Parker, 1990; Parker, 2005). Here, Parker is influenced by the work of post-structuralist writers such as Foucault (1972, 1980 as cited in Parker, 1990). However, while these two versions of discourse analysis tend to focus on different aspects of discourse, a combination may be particularly valuable (Potter & Wetherell, 1995; Willig, 2013). In the current study I primarily take a Critical Discourse Analysis approach, though utilising more of a mixed approach for the second part of the research in which I explore children's talk in a discussion group context, as I outline below.

A study of two parts

My analysis consists of two parts: an analysis of picture books, and then exploring children's talk within group discussions. For the first part of my analysis, I primarily take a critical discourse analytic approach to explore the health and body discourses available to children through the medium of picture books. In line with this approach, my focus in this research is primarily on the interacting discourses available to children, as well as their effects. How are bodies being constructed in relation to health and well-being, and what are the implications? In the second part of my analysis, exploring health and body discourses in children's talk, I employ more of a mixed approach, considering both how children use different discourses to fulfil

particular social functions within our interaction, as well as stepping back to consider the broader implications of how these discourses construct health and bodies. That is, how might the repetition of certain representations of what constitutes healthy bodies construct children's understandings, opening up certain possibilities for ways of being and doing, while closing down others?

Here then 'discourses' are sets of meanings that construct the world in a particular way, which people draw on in talk and text (and also other systems of meaning-making). While a speaker or writer must make active decisions within specific social interactions in the way they draw upon different discourses, these also do things that can be somewhat outside of the speaker or writer's control. That is the interlinked meanings can go beyond what an individual speaker intends, drawing on social meaning systems. Discourses construct objects and articulate relationships, as well as creating subject positions, addressing us in a particular way and inviting us into a particular understanding of the world- with implications for how we engage with the world. A discourse analysis then focuses on how discourses *position* people and objects in certain ways, with effects for what can be thought, felt and done. Discourses are not static, but located in time, evolving and interacting with each other. Importantly for this approach then are notions of 'multivoicedness' and contradiction, the contested nature of discourses, and how they may contradict with one another or work together. In this way, discourses function ideologically within a particular historical moment; particular ways of understanding and talking about the world are implicated in relationships of power, either supporting or challenging the status quo (Parker, 1990; Parker, 2005).

In taking a discursive approach, I follow in the footsteps of others who have come before me in the critical health literature. An acknowledgement of the need to position children as participants in (rather than objects of) research, and to value children's voices, has led to burgeoning qualitative work to explore children's experiences of diverse aspects of health and bodies (e.g. Burrows, 2008; Burrows et al., 2002; Curtis, 2008; Drummond et al., 2009; Powell & Fitzpatrick, 2013; Wills et al., 2006; Wright et al., 2012). This literature highlights the importance of making research accessible to and respectful of diverse young people; as well as the challenges inherent in research with children, and the value of diverse qualitative

methods (Curtin, 2001; Drummond et al., 2009; Kirk, 2007; Supski & Maher, 2021). For example, utilising visual research techniques such as photo-voice has proved a valuable way to engage with children about diverse aspects of health, food and physical activity, at school and home (Lindsay et al., 2021; O'Connell, 2013; D. Powell & Fitzpatrick, 2013; Supski & Maher, 2021). Likewise, utilising activities involving pictures and stories within interviews or focus groups may help with engaging children, making the research process more fun, and allowing children to express themselves in diverse ways; however, care needs to be taken in assuming particular activities such as drawing will be 'fun' and accessible for all children (Kirk, 2007). Likewise, Curtin (2001) talks about the importance of bridging different styles of communication in working with young children, as well as reducing the inequality inherent in adult-child relationships, by engaging in curious and responsive, rather than authoritarian or judgemental, ways. However, this involves a delicate balance, which I reflect on further below.

Discourses in media and the importance of multimodality

Lyons (2000) has highlighted the importance to health psychology of critically analysing media representations of health and illness. She argues that such representations can influence individuals' beliefs and understandings about health and illness, their attitudes towards themselves or others, and even mediate their lived experiences of health and illness. While her examples primarily focus on news media, popular media are likewise a useful window into cultural norms and understandings and a valuable 'text' to subject to discursive analysis. As Machin (2013) has argued:

> "Discourses are communicated not only through political speeches and news items but through entertainment media such as computer games and movies, in the social and material culture of everyday life such as fashion, toys, music, architecture, and town planning and in the very ways that we engage our bodies and interact. Discourses are communicated through different kinds of semiotic resources, different modes, and realised through different genres. And it is at this level that many people most frequently experience these discourses as fun, as style, and simply as part of the taken for granted everyday world, even if on other more or less tangible levels they feel their power over them. All these different levels of communicative activity are infused by and shaped by, power relations and ideologies." (Machin, 2013, p. 347)

Likewise, picture books for children are not apolitical but rather are embedded in a particular sociocultural context, and will draw on discourses in their constructions of the world generally, and healthy bodies particularly.

Discursive work in psychology has typically focused primarily on talk and text, perhaps due to the difficulties inherent in working with different modes, and a simultaneous perception of visual data as lesser or more simplistic, as well as more ambiguous (Reavey, 2012; Reavey & Johnson, 2008). However, talk and text are not the only systems of meaning making by which people construct the world; indeed constructionists have long argued the need to look beyond just written and spoken language, or to conceptualise 'language' more broadly (Misra, 1993), despite the challenges inherent in doing so. Likewise, Parker (1990) explicitly talks about identifying the variety of 'texts' in which discourses function in a much broader sense than just a piece of speech or writing. As Reavey argues, "multi-modality is a complex interplay between a number of meaning-making resources that are part of our experience and can be part of the way we communicate" (p. xxviii). Indeed, as Kress (and others) have argued, all communication, all meaning-making, is inevitably multimodal (Kress, 2005; Lemke, 2012), presented for example in visual as well as textual ways, whether with gesture, the embodiment of the person speaking, or the way the words are presented on the page. Images, and other aspects of multimodal communication, are an essential part of our social worlds, including the negotiation of complex notions of identity and subjectivity, and of what is seen as normal and desirable (Reavey, 2012). This is only becoming more so with the advent of new digital technologies. Psychology has been slower than other disciplines to embrace multiple modalities, including the visual; however, there is a growing recognition of their importance in the richness of experience and in the production of meaning (Frith et al., 2005; Reavey, 2012).

For my research, multimodality is particularly important in an analysis of picture books, where (most obviously) the story is constructed through both written words and illustrations (see Agosto, 1999; Guijarro, 2013; Martinez & Harmon, 2012; Shuxuan Wu1, 2014; Sunderland & Mcglashan, 2013). In this medium, words and images complement each other in such a way that neither alone can provide a

complete picture. Additionally, the stories in picture books often utilise text size and font, as well as layout on the page; likewise, the story is not only written on the page but generally read aloud and this too may be important in the production of meaning. My method of analysing the books in particular then borrows from Critical Multimodal Discourse Analysis (A. F. Gibson et al., 2015; Machin, 2013; Machin & Mayr, 2012).

Here I expect discourses about healthy bodies to be constructed through multiple modalities, including both textual and visual choices in children's picture books. Further that these choices will be embedded in social power relations (A. F. Gibson et al., 2015; Machin, 2013). That is, I don't view picture books as 'innocent' in their constructions but rather as inevitably embedded in their sociocultural context, actively working to (re)produce particular versions of the world, including elements of ideology, social institutions and social hierarchies. *How* the objects of interest (health, bodies, eating and exercise) are represented through the different modes within the picture books will create different affects, and will involve prioritisation of some bodies and behaviours over others, reproducing certain understandings of what is normal and desirable, and invoking powerful concepts such as identity, morality, family, and medical institutions.

Key in looking at picture books through this lens, meanings around health and bodies are portrayed not just by the words, but by the construction of the illustrations, by the relationships between image and text, and by narrative and tone. Key features included repetition, size and spatial orientation, symbolism, affect and humour. Additionally, being designed for reading aloud, the text has aural elements, playfully utilising rhythm and rhyme. Each mode offers different *affordances*; that is, they enable and constrain the production of meaning in particular ways, and will draw on different social conventions in the way they produce meaning (Machin, 2013). For example, while the written text may describe what a character is doing, thinking or saying, it can do so without making commitments about what they look like, their body shape, or spatial relationships. Images on the other hand must make these elements of a character specific. Likewise, other objects of interest (such as food and exercise), must be represented in specific ways through the images, and *how* this is done changes the meanings offered, engaging particular emotional

responses and inviting children into particular ways of seeing the world. Of interest then is how these modes are ‘mutually enhancing’ (Sunderland & McGlashan, 2013), how they interact to make different meanings available as well as to influence and refine how each other may be interpreted (Jewitt, 2008; Sunderland & McGlashan, 2013; Unsworth & Cléirigh, 2011), and how they can be used to avoid certain commitments, working to naturalise particular taken-for-granted understandings (Machin, 2013). I am interested in how discourses about health and bodies are drawn on in picture books, what assumptions they make about doing health and being healthy, and how these are ‘read’ by children.

Method

Part 1: Book Analysis

Book selection

I wanted to include a broad selection of picture books that reflected the diversity of meanings around 'healthy bodies' available to young children locally. To achieve this, I developed an initial list through a variety of different methods, including:

1. The Whitcoulls Top 50 Kids books list – a list of popular children's books voted for each year by the New Zealand public
2. Recommendations from a local school librarian of books available in the school library that came to mind for her as possibly relevant to the topic
3. A list of the top 35 most commonly borrowed children's picture books from the local public library
4. Themed picture books from the local public library that came up in keyword and subject heading searches that had been borrowed 6 or more times in the last 12 months[1].

Through these methods I selected books directly related to my topics of interest, as well as simply the most popular books. These diverse methods allowed me to include not just obviously 'themed' books, but also popular books that may have more subtle or oblique messages around healthy bodies in the initial selection. It also meant the selection included both new books and older 'classics' that have remained popular over time, as well as books published in a variety of places (the UK, NZ, USA and Australia). This allowed a broad snapshot that is likely to more accurately reflect the diversity of what local children are reading, than if a single method (for example, utilising recent literary award winners) had been used.

[1] Keyword and subject headings including: Health; Obesity; Fat; Body size; Body image; Self-esteem; Social acceptance; Bullying; Food; Eating; Exercise; Physical activity.

I then went through this list and narrowed it down to a manageable number for analysis, ensuring that only books classified as 'children's picture books', and only one book from each author, were included, as well as excluding books where I could see no material for analysis relating to the research focus on 'healthy bodies' (including anything related to shape/size, eating, exercise, diversity, or body image). This meant excluding most of the simpler stories for younger readers (for example based around counting, listing, rhyming); as well as stories about machines or (non-personified) animals, unless something about the words or illustrations seemed potentially relevant.

Book analysis

I then conducted a broad descriptive thematic analysis (TA) of the remaining books (42 books; See Appendix 1). Here TA provided a flexible tool to begin to organise and describe the rich detail of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006) in this wider selection of books. In particular, this involved working through how each of the key focus areas identified in my first research question (health; food/eating; physical activity/exercise; body size; body image; self-esteem; diversity/individuality) were referenced in the picture books, and beginning to map out these different constructions. The focus here was on describing the variety of meanings across the books, so the criteria for including 'themes' was left open, allowing space to include any patterns of meaning relating to my research questions later on. While multimodality formed a background influence here, at this stage I didn't delve deeply into the interplay of different modes in constructing these ideas.

However, for the next step of analysis I wanted to look at some of the books in more depth, exploring how healthy bodies were constructed multimodally across the illustrations and texts of the stories. In order to get to a more manageable number of books that could be subject to a more in-dpeth, thorough analysis, I excluded books that were out of print, and ones that were only tangentially related to health and bodies, ending up with seven books to examine using a multimodal critical discourse analysis (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

This stage involved multiple re readings of the books, focusing on different modes. Here both the words, images and elements of layout, structure and style apparent in the picture books were considered parts of the 'texts' under study, important aspects of how they produce meaning, as well as their contextual meaning- that is their meaning in use. I also specifically attended to affect and humour, and any inconsistencies in how books were constructing health and bodies. Extracts from the stories were collected, by taking pictures of different elements within the books; and both NVivo and OneNote, as well as mindmapping software, were used to group extracts together in different ways, to explore the relationships between them.

The questions in Table 1 below (modified from Blumenreich & Siegel, 2006; Gibson et al., 2015), were used to help guide this iterative process of analysis, and to explore how different constructions might be engaging with wider discursive structures.

Table 1. Guiding questions for Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis

How is meaning around healthy bodies constructed?
What modes are present?
What is said? (verbally?) What is shown? (visually?)
How do the different modes interact?
What view of the world is being constructed?
What other versions of the topic/world could be constructed?
What is absent/missing? What other gaps and silences are in the text?
What is assumed/taken for granted?
How does the text want me to feel, think, act?
What people are in the text? Who is left out of the text? Why?
To whom is the text written/shaped/spoken?
Why and by whom has the text been written/shaped/spoken?
Who stands to benefit/who is disadvantaged from the way this topic is presented?

In this analysis I focused on what meanings were made available within the picture books; In the following stage, I attempt to explore whether and how these are actually taken up by children as readers/viewers/listeners.

Part 2: Discussion Group Analysis

Following on from the picture book analysis, I conducted ten discussion groups with 5-6 year olds at a local school, using four of the picture books as a focus for discussion. I discuss the processes involved below.

Recruitment

A relatively large New Zealand public school, with multiple year one and two classes was chosen to give a broad research sample while keeping the project manageable. Initial contact was made through the school Principal, and involved meeting to discuss what the research would involve as well as sharing with them an information letter about the project and its aims (See Appendix 2). The Principal then introduced me to the teachers of the correct age group, and letters were sent home to parents inviting their children to participate, and explaining what this would involve. We started with one classroom, with the ability to expand to others if not enough children were given parental consent. In the end children from three different classrooms participated. I attended an afternoon session with the first class to get to know the children and teacher, and allow them to become more comfortable with me. For the other classrooms the teacher introduced me to the class more briefly before each session.

The school had a mid-decile rating, and was relatively ethnically diverse, with 47% Māori students, 40% European/Pākehā, 4% Asian, 3% Pacific Island, and the remaining 6% of other ethnicities.

Participants

Contact with whānau was made through the school, using the typical school notices process, with the classroom teacher distributing parental information and consent documents (See Appendix 3 and Appendix 4) to children to be taken home to their parents to read and return if they were happy for their child to participate. I was aiming for ten discussion groups of 2-3 children. However, uptake from parents in each classroom was relatively low, with only eight children returning parental consent documents in the first

class; therefore, to achieve our desired sample size I met with the teachers of two more classrooms, and information was sent home to parents. Parental consent was returned for six children from each of the second and third classes.

Participants were Year 2 students (5-6 year olds). This age was chosen both to follow on from previous research, which suggests that children as young as six and perhaps even younger are picking up messages about health and body shapes; as well as for practical reasons. Year two students are likely to have been exposed to a range of discourses around healthy bodies (from home, school, media, and peers); they will be settled in the school setting (compared with new entrants) and therefore more likely to engage in the research setting at school, and are more likely to be able to express themselves and articulate their ideas than younger children; but are still young enough to read and enjoy picture books. Additionally, this younger age group has been the focus of less research, and so was of particular interest to me.

While we had intended to organise children into groups with friends to ensure they would be comfortable in sessions, practicality made this difficult, with the small number of participants from each classroom, and busy schedules of the teachers. Grouping was therefore done on a practical basis, although groups were predominantly from the same classroom. The exceptions to this were groups 8 and 9 which were made up of some of the children who had been away, or who had changed classrooms between gaining parental consent and when the research groups took place. Group 10 was the only mixed gender group, with a boy and a girl together, who were good friends from the same classroom. Children seemed to be comfortable in their research groups and eager to participate. An overview of participants is provided in table 1 (on the following page). The child's age and ethnic identification were provided by parents (with open-ended questions). Participants included 10 girls and 10 boys, and identified (by their parents) as a range of ethnicities, including mixtures of NZ European (10), Kiwi/New Zealanders (7), Māori (7), Samoan (2), Tongan (1), NZ Chinese (1), Asian (1), and Chilean (1). One also was identified as having special learning needs, and one as autistic. Three were five years old, and the rest six years old.

Table 2. Summary of discussion groups

Group	Pseudonyms	Classroom
1	Tayla, Nicole & Chloe	All 6 years old, from Room A
2	James & Corey	Both 6 years old, from Room A
3	Hemi	6 years old, from Room A (remaining 2 boys were unavailable this day)
4	Jane & Piper	5 & 6 years old, both from Room B
5	Jack & Levi	5 & 6 years old, both from Room B
6	Aimee & Lara	Both 6 years old, from Room C
7	Isabella & Ada	5 & 6 years old, both from Room C
8	William & Lucas	Both 6 years old, from Rooms A and B
9	Riley & Felipe	Both 6 years old, from Rooms A and B
10	Hannah & Liam	Both 6 years old, from Room C

Prompts

Four books were chosen to read with children in discussion groups: *A Piece of Cake*, *Willy the Wimp*, *Cinderella's Bum*, and *The Yoga Ogre*. These were a subset of the ones chosen for in-depth analysis in the previous stage, offering key meanings around healthy bodies as identified in the book analysis, while reducing the number of books to make it more manageable in a discussion group setting. While utilising the full seven chosen for multimodal analysis would have been ideal for providing a variety of prompts, this was considered impractical within the time-frame; and indeed even four books proved a challenge to get through in a single discussion session. *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* and *Vegetable Glue* were therefore dropped from discussion groups as they were deemed to be less current and relevant for our focus on healthy *bodies*, in particular. Additionally, a political choice was made here in terms of the potential for harm from the level of fat stigma represented in the stories and potentially being seen as implicitly supporting the messages in the stories through the act of reading them with children. For this reason, *Flabby Cat and Slobby Dog* was also removed from the selection, as the most uncomfortable for me to read with children.

Additionally, paper and coloured pencils were provided to engage children, and allow for children to express themselves in alternative ways; these were also considered a way to make the process less confronting for children by offering them something to do and focus on.

Consent process

Each session began by going through child versions of information and consent documents (see Appendices 5 and 6), to check children were willing to participate, before continuing with the discussion group. These documents also emphasised that if they chose to participate they did not have to answer any questions they didn't want to, could stop anytime they wanted, and could ask me any questions they wanted. I also explained that sessions would be video recorded (although only I would see the recordings), and that I would not use their real names. Although these documents had been developed to be relatively accessible in terms of language (modelled on those developed by Ford, Sankey, & Crisp, 2007), given the very young age of participants they were generally above participants' reading level, and care was therefore taken to read these aloud with participants and explain anything that they found confusing.

All children who were offered agreed they would like to participate and share some of their ideas with me; although a few decided to go back and re-join their classroom activities partway through. This is reassuring in that it suggests they understood that participation was voluntary, and were able to say they wanted to stop when they had had enough or got bored.

An unexpected difficulty, given the low numbers of children given parental permission, was having to turn down the children who had not received parental permission but who wanted to be part of the 'special' research groups on the day, as children tended to gather round me when I was at the classroom to ask who I was and why I was there (before I had been introduced), and if I was taking them today? Children and teachers were very welcoming, and as one teacher explained, used to people coming and going to do different activities with them.

Procedure

Over the following few months, I met with the children who had gained parental permission in their research discussion groups during class-time, arranging appropriate times with their teachers to be least disruptive to class schedules. Sessions lasted approximately 40 minutes each, and were conducted in a variety of small offices/meeting rooms adjoining the classrooms. The children and I sat round low classroom desks together, with a video camera set up to record our conversation, as well as the books and drawing materials children engaged with. The camera was useful to record not just what children said, but also expressions, gestures and movement, which often formed an important part of their communication. Children were interested in the camera and recording process, often checking on the view screen what was being recorded as well as asking questions about it (and in one case requesting I share the video on Facebook, to which I had to reiterate that that was not possible and only I would see it); while it was at times distracting, at other times children's direct engagement with the camera brought out some rich data.

We began each discussion group by going through the child information letters together (me reading them aloud to children), before asking children if they would like to help with the research, and if so filling out the child consent forms together. Children were given an opportunity to ask any questions, and reminded that they could do so at any time. Children seemed reasonably comfortable with this process, enjoying writing their names and having a go at a signature, and occasionally asking for further clarification about the process. I also briefly introduced the focus on healthy bodies and suggested that they 'be the teachers' and teach me about health/hauora. This idea was an engaging one for the kids, and helped start off the discussion. Some in particular really enjoyed taking charge, and reminded me often that they were the teachers.

The discussion groups were semi-structured, beginning with broader questions and then evolving to follow children's interest and ideas, and to engage with the books and drawing materials provided. In the first group, I handed out paper and pens at the start, explaining that they were there so they could draw or

write their ideas if they wanted to. However, the first group enjoyed this task so much that we only managed to read one of the stories together, and had to schedule a second session. Therefore, for the other groups I was more careful to start on the books earlier, generally following on from the broader questions by jumping into reading one of the picture books aloud and handing out paper and pens later in the discussion when children seemed to be needing a change of activity.

Still, in some groups we read all four stories, while in others we only had time for three. The order of the stories was flexible and generally guided by the children's interest. Often children did some drawing while listening to some of the stories, and their talk switches back and forth between these activities. I asked children questions about what they were drawing, and about the content of the books as we read and how they made sense of them, as well as their overall impressions of the books, to explore their ideas about healthy bodies.

Despite the make-up of the groups ending up primarily based on practical considerations, children seemed comfortable in their groups. These usually consisted of two to three children from the same classroom, and usually of the same gender, though with some exceptions as discussed above. The group focus was effective for the children to be able to bounce ideas off of each other, sometimes building on ideas together and at other times disagreeing or negotiating an idea in their talk within the interaction.

Many of the children were very engaged with the process and the prompts, both the drawing and the books; others did find it quite difficult to sit still and focus for so long, getting distracted and wandering the room- and two of these decided to finish early and return to their classrooms. Others expressed how much they enjoyed the process, asking if they could participate again.

Figure 1. Isabella's drawing: "This is for you… it's you reading the story to me and Ada… and we like the story".

Ethical concerns

The present research study was considered in relation to the Code of Ethics for dealing with human participants as described by the Human Ethics Committee at Massey University, and that of the New Zealand Psychological Society. The key ethical issues were included in the research proposal, and discussed in detail with my supervisors, and ethical approval gained from the MUHEC- Southern B (Application 15/27). Ethical considerations primarily focused around informed consent, potential harm, and cultural competency.

In terms of informed consent, as discussed above, we designed separate information and consent letters for children and parents (see Appendices 3, 4, 5, & 6). As children are inevitably in a position of vulnerability and imbalanced power relationships, we were concerned with working to create a respectful and empowering relationship as much as possible, and protecting participants from any harm for or difficulty in

withdrawing their consent at any time. Consent was also gained from both participants and their parents for discussion sessions to be videotaped, with it made clear that this would be accessible only to myself.

In terms of potential harm, although we did not anticipate participants would be uncomfortable or harmed in the interview process, we were also aware that bodies and health can be sensitive issues. It was hoped that this was mitigated by taking care in the phrasing of questions; having prompts such as books, pens and paper to take the pressure off the children, providing a focus for discussion and enable the conversation to focus on wider and theoretical rather than more personal issues; as well as maintaining a respectful, supportive and friendly manner. I endeavoured to respond to children in a consistently non-judgemental and curious mode, emphasising that there were no 'right' or 'wrong' answers, I was just interested in 'whatever they thought'. However, I was prepared to reinforce class agreements about respectful and appropriate comments and behaviour, or to cease discussion groups if I was concerned.

Prompts were age-appropriate materials (children's picture books) similar to what children were likely to come across in their everyday lives, at school and home. Picture books were chosen from those currently available to, and being read by, local children through their school and public libraries. Previous research on body related messages in children's media (although limited) suggested that picture books tended to include milder and more positive messages than those available on other media such as films and television; although as I discuss in my own findings this can be variable. Consideration of potential harm from body stigmatisation messages was therefore one of the factors considered in choosing the final subset of books to be read with children.

These potential harms were seen to be balanced against potential benefits of the research, including greater understanding of how children in New Zealand talk about bodies and health, and interpret health messages in their talk, potentially useful from a policy perspective in terms of promoting well-being, as well as for schools, teachers, and parents/guardians in terms of a greater understanding of what sort of messages children are picking up. It was also hoped that in line with child-centred approaches that

foreground children’s voices, discussion groups would be a positive experience for participants where they got to express themselves and have their thoughts and opinions valued.

Finally, although ethnicity was not a particular focus of the research, culture clearly has far reaching implications in all aspects of social life; as well as research needing to adhere to the obligations in terms of partnership, participation and protection outlined in Te Tiriti o Waitangi in relation to Māori as our tangata whenua. It was considered important to respect the diversity of participants, including cultural practices and beliefs, and to seek consultation on issues of cultural competence, as well as being conscious of my own Pākehā world-view during discussion groups. However, the books chosen to read with participants were also fairly Eurocentric, so it is perhaps unsurprising that this followed through into the data.

Researcher

My presence as researcher is inevitably enmeshed with the research, from decision making throughout the project, to my embodied presence in the discussion group setting. Notably then my presentation as a plus-size white/pākehā woman in my early thirties, who was also between three and eight months pregnant, is likely to have influenced the ways in which children engaged with me and the discursive resources they drew on. In the earlier interviews for example they may have been more likely to read my body as ‘fat’, while the later ones are more likely to have read it as ‘pregnant’, with different connotations and social implications. For example, in one of the earlier groups, Tayla seemed to identify with me in this sense, commenting in passing, “we’re the fat girls aye?”; while in later groups participants asked about when the baby was due, and talked about their own little siblings at home. These different constructions are likely to have also influenced the ways children engaged with me in the way they talked about fatness and healthy living.

Additionally interviews/discussion groups with children presented particular challenges. Engaging with children involved a balancing act, encouraging and respecting all children’s constributions, ‘holding’ ethical considerations and politics of the discussion space, and working to reduce the power imbalance inherent in

adult-child interactions as much as possible, alongside practical considerations with a number of active children in groups and needing to keep interviews/discussion groups loosely focused. Familiarity in engaging with children of a variety of ages, and of taking on this kind of friendly adult role, was therefore valuable. Likewise, Mandell (1991) talks about taking up a “least adult role” (as cited in Gibson, 2012), highlighting the importance of working to reduce power dynamics in research with children; while acknowledging that these will always be present to some degree. Similarly, Birbeck and Drummond (2009) talk about being a “participating adult” (p.586), in order to engage authentically with children. While I was only pregnant with my first child during discussion groups, I have a large extended family, including many nephews and nieces with whom I am close, so I am comfortable talking to children from this type of friendly non-authoritarian position.

I encouraged children to ‘be the teachers’, a role that participants eagerly took up, and sometimes tested the boundaries of, as suggested by Curtin (2001). This meant that I did occasionally have to impose limits, on what was safe and appropriate behaviour; and was prepared to step in and remind children of classroom rules if necessary. However, within these limits I aimed to engage with children as a friendly and empathetic adult, following their lead where possible. I reminded children that there were no right or wrong answers, and tried to be mindful of my responses to be encouraging of participation, rather than being judgemental about the content (Curtin, 2001). As Curtin noted, children’s responses were sometimes short. Reflecting children’s words back to them was a useful technique, to acknowledge their responses, and encourage clarifying or expanding these, without making assumptions.

Data

Discussion groups were video-recorded (with sound) so that spoken discussion could be put into the context of the research interaction. This allowed me to capture some of the gestures and expressions that are particularly important in communication with young children (who may have various levels of confidence and skill in spoken language), as well as interactions with prompt materials such as picture

books, pens and paper. This was valuable, as participants were sometimes hard to hear (e.g. speaking quietly or over top of each other, and actively moving about the room); additionally, it was common for them to point to a picture in a story (or one that they had drawn), or to demonstrate a particular idea physically or through gestures, making the spoken conversation fragmented/incomplete without these visual elements of communication. Gestures were particularly key in children's communication of ideas around fitness and muscular body types, as I discuss later.

I transcribed the videos, recording both spoken word and elements of gesture and expression to give context and nuance to what was spoken (See Appendix 7 for a guide to the transcription notation used). This is always partial; a process of 'transduction' from one mode to another, to make the 'text' more accessible. Additionally, it is an *active* process, continuing my immersion in the data, and forming part of the analytical process through the careful selection of what should be included to re-present the interaction for the purpose of the analysis (Bezemer & Mavers, 2011; Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Analysis

Utilising NVivo, analysis software, to help with organisation and coding of data, the transcripts were reread and initial codes developed and refined as I worked through the data set, to draw out notable features and patterns of meaning. My previous analysis of the books served as a base for developing themes, exploring how children engaged with and negotiated the meanings I had identified in the books, alongside familiarity with the literature, and attempting to remain open to new ideas that arose through children's talk in the discussion group context.

In my analysis I initially drew on Braun and Clarke's (2006) detailed approach to conducting a thematic analysis (TA), to explore patterns of meaning in the data. While of course a method in its own right, TA is also a useful base for other qualitative approaches, such as Discourse Analysis, providing a way to organise and describe data in rich detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This involved an iterative process of engaging with the data, coding and identifying themes, reviewing and refining them. Here the researcher is an active

participant in identifying and defining themes, co-constructing meaning, guided by their research questions.

In developing themes, and then exploring how these might relate to wider discourses, I also draw on Parker's (1990) criteria for identifying 'discourses', as well as Willig's (2001) 'recipe' for conducting a Foucauldian Discourse Analysis[2]. This involves exploring the ways in which the discursive objects of interest are constructed in the text (in this case being healthy, bodies, food/eating, and physical activity/exercise); the differences between constructions, and any contradictions that may highlight different discourses interacting; how different discursive constructions are deployed in context within children's talk; what subject positions they offer; and the implications of these for what can be thought, felt and done. In my analysis I worked through how the children responded to and talked about each of the books, and the features I had identified in my book analysis (described in chapter 6), as well as developing three main discourses from children's talk around health and bodies (discussed in chapter 7). Finally I focus on exploring how the discourses interact, and any potential alternative discourses in children's talk and interactions.

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[2] though as Willig (2001) notes an abridged version without specific attention to "Foucault's concern with the historicity and evolution of discursive formations over time (their genealogy)" (p. 131)

Book analysis: Broad

The initial analysis of the books was conducted in a predominantly inductive manner, looking for both manifest and latent meanings, although also guided by my own reading of the academic literature. I read through the books looking for instances where they drew on meanings related to health and bodies and the related foci of interest identified in my research questions (body shape/size, food/eating, exercise/physical activity, diversity, body image and gender), attempting to be open to diverse interpretations of what this might look like. I loosely grouped instances together based on similarities of meaning, as well as starting to look for contrasting meanings, and what was not present. I begin below with a broad outline of the books in relation to these topics, starting with health generally, then food/eating and physical activity, before exploring body image and self-esteem, diversity, individuality, and social relationships, and finally drawing some of these different aspects together in a discussion of body size/shape. In the next chapter, I then focus more deeply on seven key books to explore *how* these ideas are negotiated multimodally in stories and images.

Health

Only two of the books dealt with health in relation to a biomedical model, in terms of an absence of illness and disease, or the biological functions of the body. The first was *Inside the Human Body* (1990), from the *Magic School Bus* series, in which Miss Frizzle and her class delve into different scientific phenomena; in this case the inner workings of the human body, getting a close up look at major organs and how they work. Another, *Dr Dog* (1997), explored a variety of health issues experienced by the Gumboyle family, as their family pet (who is also a doctor) diagnoses their problems, from a cough caused by smoking, to tonsillitis from not wearing a coat, to head lice, earache, and wind (caused by drinking too much beer and eating too many baked beans). One other, *Reindeer Christmas* (2008), involved rescuing one of Santa's

reindeer who had been caught in a blizzard, and was nursed back to health "with food and warmth and rest".

A couple of the stories also deal with the healthy body in terms of body parts and the functioning of the body: in *I Need a New Bum* (2012), the protagonist decides his bum is broken as "it's got a crack", and goes searching for a new one; while the girl in *Vegetable Glue* (2004) loses first her right arm, then her head, then her bottom. In this case, what is needed to repair her is 'vegetable glue', which she must keep with her to "stick parts back on". However, as the story progresses we learn that vegetable glue is "not in the stores, and it's not on the telly, Because vegetable glue is in everyone's belly. When you eat up your greens your body makes glue, which keeps all your parts still sticking to you". This story, although in a playful way, clearly deals with the health of the body, with a focus on diet (specifically vegetables). Likewise, *A Piece of Cake* (1989) explicitly deals with health in terms of "healthy living", specifically diet and exercise. Additionally others explored issues around social and emotional health; I explore these in more detail below.

Food and Eating

Many of the books included themes around food and eating, ranging from being a key focus of the story (as in *The Tiger Who Came to Tea* (1968) to being a background feature (for example in *The Lion in the Meadow* (1969) where the mother is shown feeding the baby, having a hot drink and biscuit, picking vegetables from the garden, and preparing vegetables for a meal). Two books explicitly discuss going 'on a diet' (*Willy the Wimp, 1984; A Piece of Cake, 1989*), while three others demonstrate a character's typical

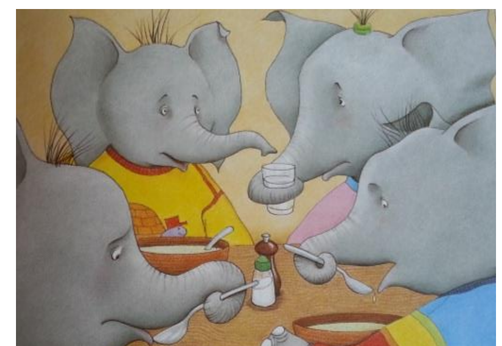

Figure 2. Illustration from *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (2002), showing the wide variety of foods he eats on Saturday; and *The Large Family: A Piece of Cake* (1989), showing the family of elephants eating dinner.

diet through their words and images (*The Yoga Ogre, 2012; Fat Ferdie, 2013; Flabby Cat and Slobby Dog, 2010*), and *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (1969) iconically explores what a little caterpillar eats on different days of the week, before transforming into a butterfly (see Figure 2 for an example of the variety of foods he eats on Saturday).

A wide variety of foods feature in the stories, from fruits and vegetables, including: bananas, oranges, apples, pears, peas, carrots, potatoes, mushrooms, cauliflower, cabbage, turnips, beans, sprouts, tomatoes, pickles, and watermelon. To a variety of other foods, both savoury (pies, spaghetti, rice, baked beans, eggs, sausages, cheese, salami and fish fingers) and sweet (cake, biscuits, pies, ice-cream, lollypops, cupcakes). In some stories, these were passing references; in others particular foods played a prominent role in the story, and the development of the characters. In *Fat Ferdie* (2013), Ferdie learns to like fruit (pears) over meat. In *Vegetable Glue* (2004), the story highlights the important role of vegetables, and the disastrous consequences for the narrator of refusing to eat them – compared with her granny who “ate all her greens before leaving the table”. Interestingly, this is one of the only stories that explicitly labels food as good/bad, the narration noting “I wouldn’t eat good things, I only ate cake!”. Similarly, *A Piece of Cake* (1989) is one of the only stories that specifically labels foods as ‘healthy’.

Foods were presented as desirable or undesirable in both subtle and blatant ways. For example, in many of the stories characters explicitly state their likes or dislikes in relation to food (although as I discuss further below in relation to themes around fussy eating, many of the characters change their minds over the course of the story). At other times the (un)desirability of food is demonstrated more indirectly, for example through how the character feels after eating (e.g. *Piggy Poggett,* (2009) or *the Very Hungry Caterpillar,* (1969)), or through the way particular foods are presented in the words or images, particularly via characters’ expressions.

Many of the books also involved themes of eating in great quantity or to excess (6 books), for example featuring images of food in mountainous piles to demonstrate this, as in the figure to the right. However, this device was used in different ways. For example, in books like *The Yoga Ogre* (2012), the ogre’s diet is

outlined near the start of the book to draw attention to his body size/shape, and set up the story for his weight-loss efforts over the rest of the book, the first page (shown in Figure 3) asking '"How has my tum got so terribly wide? I only eat TWELVE meals a day" Ogden sighed'. Similarly, *Flabby Cat and Slobby Dog* (2010), as well as *Fat Ferdie* (2013), both books clearly exploring ideas around fatness or obesity, demonstrate through both words and pictures the large quantities being eaten by the title characters.

However, this device also came up in a number of other books. In comparison to the negative implications suggested about the large characters in the books above, in the *Tiger Who Came to Tea* (1968), the large amounts eaten by the tiger (see figure 3) are in themselves the focus of the story, and seem to be suggested to be the nature of being a big hungry tiger, something that causes problems when coming from an unexpected guest, but not something that is constructed as a problem for the tiger in itself. Similarly, while *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (1969) eats a wide variety of foods in increasingly large quantities, this is used to explore his growing up from a tiny newly hatched caterpillar to a big fat caterpillar ready to transition into a cocoon and then a butterfly. In *Willy the Wimp* (1984), Willy is again shown surrounded by piles of food (in this case bananas, see Figure 3), but in this case this is part of "a special diet" designed to get Willy to bulk up, becoming bigger and stronger.

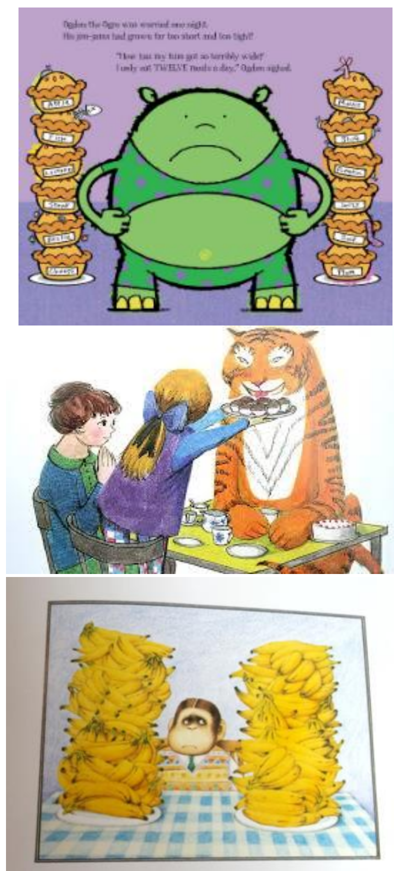

Figure 3. Illustrations of food and eating from *The Yoga Ogre (2012;* top); *The Tiger Who Came to Tea* (1968; middle); and *Willy the Wimp* (1984; bottom).

The diverse contexts and motivations of eating in these examples mean that the results for the characters are also diverse. For some (e.g. the tiger and the caterpillar), eating in great quantity seems to be to satisfy their hunger, with few ill effects. For others, there is clearly a relationship indicated between overeating and gaining weight, one that is often portrayed in a negative light (*Willy the Wimp* being an exception to this, where his large diet, while still associated with increasing body size, is being actively used to achieve a socially desirable body). In others, the result is more

immediate, with a focus on how the character feels. Interestingly, in *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (Carle, 1969) the day on which he eats the most is also the only day on which he eats things other than fruits and vegetables, and ends up with a sore tummy. Here then, this device doesn't seem to colour the character of the caterpillar, but it is constructed as a kind of overindulgence, with immediate effects for how the caterpillar *feels*. Likewise in *Piggy Pogget* (2009), when the little pig finds himself in the middle of a corn field (his favourite food) and eats cob after cob, he finds himself eventually feeling queasy (see Figure 4below), highlighting perhaps the idea that you can have too much of a good thing (interestingly in this case not just the little pig's favourite food but also a vegetable).

Figure 4. Illustrations from *Piggy Poggett* (Tulloch, 2009).

In contrast to this idea of overeating, another common theme in relation to food/eating was refusing to eat certain foods, or fussy eating (4 books). Books such as *I Will Never Not Ever Eat a Tomato* (2003) and *Green Eggs and Ham* (1960), with its familiar refrain of "I do not like green eggs and ham, I do not like them Sam I Am", clearly explore this idea of disliking certain foods or refusing to try them. In both these stories, the characters eventually try the disavowed foods and find that they are actually not so bad. Similarly, in another take on this idea, *Fat Ferdie* (2013) begins the story with a diet of "little creatures! Red raw meat!", and it is not until he is foiled in his attempts to eat the children, and finds himself hungry and sitting in a pile of pears that had fallen on him out of a tree that he "decides to have a taste" and finds them "YUMMY" so he "ate them ALL and filled his tummy. Now what does Fat Ferdie like to eat? Only pears, NEVER meat". Like the characters in the previous books, Ferdie begins with a disavowal of certain foods (in this case presumably fruit, vegetables and anything else that isn't meat) in deed if not directly through dialogue; but

changes his tune once he tries something different. These books then, seem to be exploring a common cultural issue or source of contention between parents and children, that of picky eating, in a playful and humorous way.

Other books also explored characters' likes and dislikes in relation to food, although without this theme of changing tastes (4 books). For example, *Piggy Poggett* (2009) lays out the little pig's likes (slops), dislikes (porridge, peas) and loves (corn), constructing his character and personality in a simple and relatable way for children, and setting up the story for his adventure when he is disappointed to find it is porridge and peas for breakfast. Interestingly in this example, the types of foods that are liked and disliked appear to be fairly neutral, with vegetables for example on both sides. Similarly, in *I Will Never Not Ever Eat A Tomato* (2003), while vegetables make up most of the things Lola refuses to eat, fish fingers were also included. Interestingly, many of the books appeared to take this sort of stance, in that the foods that were treated as yummy or desirable, or undesirable, included both typically healthy and unhealthy foods.

Finally, the social significance and etiquette surrounding food and eating was also highlighted in the stories. For example, the *Tiger Who Came to Tea* (1968) explores the sharing of food with a guest. Sophie and her mother appear to be excellent hosts, happy to invite the hungry tiger in and share their food, and make no complaint when instead of taking just one biscuit (or bun, or piece of cake, or cup of tea) he eats and drinks ALL the food and drink in the house- despite the uncomfortable situation this leaves them in with nothing left for their dinner that evening, nor enough water for Sophie's bath. Clearly the tiger disobeys the unspoken rules of etiquette for being a good guest – but he is a tiger after all. *Tea for Ruby* (2010) also focuses on social etiquette – in this case with Ruby being reminded about manners (such as eating with her mouth closed) by her friends and relations as she prepares for tea with the 'Queen' (really her grandma). *Harry and the Dinosaurs Have A Happy Birthday* (1999) also portrays food in a social setting, in this case in relation to a special occasion: birthday parties. Harry and various members of his family (Nan, mum, and big sister) prepare food for their neighbour, and then for the surprise party they throw for him and Harry's dinosaur friends. Apart from *Harry and the Dinosaurs* few of the stories focused on the growing, or the

preparation, of food; the other exceptions being three of the older stories, *The Lion in the Meadow* (1969), *Peepo!* (1981) and the *Tiger Who Came to Tea* (1968), which show in the illustrations the mother in the story preparing food for the family (and in the former, also collecting vegetables from the veggie garden). Gender was a notable feature of these stories which focus on the social significance and preparation of food, with it predominantly being women who are shown preparing and serving the food.

Exercise and physical activity

As with eating, exercise of some kind was portrayed in many, if not most of the books, both as a central idea of many of the themed books and more implicitly in the way characters in many of the stories use their bodies and in the kinds of activities they are shown to engage in through words or pictures. Although the themed books from the public library didn't include subject headings related to exercise, physical activity or fitness, the overlap in ideas means that books with keywords such as 'obesity' often included themes around exercise also. For example, one such book *The Yoga Ogre* (2012), follows Ogden the ogre as he tries a variety of types of physical activity on the advice of "the people", who suggest that "overweight ogres should take up a sport". Similarly, the school librarian's recommendations included books where physical activity in relation to health was a central idea. For example, in *Shock Monday* (1999) the mother decides they will all walk to school that day, instead of driving. A wide variety of specific types of physical activity were apparent in the books, including: going to the gym, running, walking, cycling, soccer/football, yoga, dancing, swimming, karate, and climbing trees.

Sometimes this was clearly identified as deliberate exercise; In *Monster Day At Work* (2010), for example, which follows a young monster as he tags along with his father's day, the story notes "after work Dad likes to exercise, so we go to the gym", with a picture of monsters engaged in a variety of activities from running on the treadmill, to some kind of stretching or dance activity on a mat- to playing on a playground with a slide (perhaps highlighting the child's perspective and interpretation of the adult places and activities

depicted). The words on this page are also interesting in that they suggest enjoyment ("Dad likes to exercise"), or at least leave the reason for wanting to exercise ambiguous. In other stories, deliberate exercise is explicitly linked to health and to body management (e.g. *A Piece of Cake, Willy the Wimp*).

However, physical activity also appears in many of the books as play and socialisation. Children (or personified animals) are often shown playing on playgrounds or jungle gyms as the context or background to the story - e.g. *Sylvester & Arnold* (2013)*, Purplicious* (2007)*, Phoebe & Digger* (2013)*, Look There's A Hippopotamus In The Playground Eating Cake* (2007). In *Harry And The Dinosaurs Have A Happy Birthday* (1999), the characters play party games, including wheelbarrow racing, as well as "hiding and pouncing and squirting and splashing". In books such as *Big & Small* (2014), the characters "go out to play", including activities like hopping, skipping and jumping across a stream. Similarly Daisy, her brother, and his friends climb trees as well as playing soccer (*Daisy the Dinosaur Gets Lost*; 2011), while *Sunday Chutney* (2009) is shown skipping, swimming, throwing a ball, and playing soccer, and Max and the wild things (*Where the Wild Things Are;* 1963) engage in a "wild rumpus", involving wild dancing and swinging through the trees. *Piggy Poggett* (2009) is shown doing some of his favourite activities (playing in the mud, climbing trees, digging) as well as on his adventure through fields, and streams, over bridges and stiles, as he explores the big wide world. In other books characters also appear to go on adventures, although with more ambiguous levels of physical activity (*Room on the Broom* (2001)*, Green Eggs & Ham* (1960)). Such representations were widespread in the books, and generally presented in ways (such as the characters' expressions) that suggested fun and enjoyment.

*In*activity was also explored in a few of the books (3 books). For example, *Flabby Cat and Slobby Dog* (2010) begins with images of cat and dog sitting on their mysteriously shrinking couch, watching TV, as well as sleeping and sleeping and sleeping. While the story notes that this (along with eating) was "all very comforting", this is contrasted with the results as their furniture (and eventually whole house) continue to shrink (or so they believe), connecting inactivity with body size. In *A Piece of Cake* (1989), the mother elephant (Mrs Large) exclaims "no more sitting around all day. From now on, it's healthy living", making a

clear link between inactivity and being unhealthy. Few of the books appeared to directly highlight inactivity in a positive sense in relation to health– for example rest or relaxation; One exception being *Reindeer Christmas* (2008) which, as described above, notes the reindeer's need for rest to feel better. While *Monster Day at Work* (2010), and *Peepo!* (Ahlberg & Ahlberg, 1981) feature the child narrator, and mother respectively, taking a nap after their busy morning, neither links this to health.

Some of the books also explore notions of ability and inability in relation to physical activities, often tied into aspects of body size/shape. In *Tell Me What It's Like to Be Big* (2001), the littlest rabbit can't reach things up high on a shelf, so she has to enlist the help of her big sister. Some similarity is seen in *Guess How Much I Love You* (1994), which uses the greater physical capacity of Big Nutbrown Hare (reaching wider and taller, hopping higher) to play with the central theme of attempting to quantify how much they love each other. In these stories, the idea of growing older/bigger is tied in with this increasing capacity and ability to do things. In *Big and Small* (2014), the characters natural body size (rather than age) comes into play, when the two friends (a bear and a mouse) find their big and small relative body sizes useful, and limiting, in different ways over the course of their adventure. In particular in this story, like those where body size is associated with age, it is predominantly the little mouse that keeps getting into trouble and needs to be rescued by Big; however, in the end Big too requires some assistance, with Small helping him to fall asleep.

In contrast, in *Fat Ferdie* (2013), Ferdie is foiled in his attempt to eat the children when they climb a tree, the story noting that "Fat Ferdie couldn't climb the tree. (He was far too fat you see). He sat down on the ground instead"; here, fat is clearly indicated as a limiting factor, at least for climbing trees. Ogden the Ogre (*The Yoga Ogre*; 2012) too appears to be limited by his size and classification as 'overweight', as he tries and discards a number of sports, causing mayhem whatever he tries.

Three other stories explore characters' ability in relation to other aspects of the characters' body: *Wheelie Girl* (2007), following Molly (a small girl with wheels instead of feet) begins with her exclamation that she "can't do anything… I can't skip, or swing, or kick a football… I always end up in a muddle". With the advice of a wise butterfly that "everyone can do something, you just have to find out what it is", Molly embarks on

a mission to find what she is good at; however, all her attempts go wrong in curious ways, until she manages to help catch a runaway dog with the speed her wheels give her. In a similar vein, Frog (*Frog is Frog;* 1998) is envious of the things the other animals can do (especially Duck and her ability to fly), and becomes disheartened, considering himself a "useless" and "ordinary green frog", but eventually comes to terms with his own special abilities with a "big frog leap, as only frogs can do". Finally, *Cinderella's Bum* (2004) explores the usefulness of bottoms of different shapes and sizes as a little girl attempts to cheer up her sister who "wouldn't come swimming because her swim suit was too tight. 'My bum must have grown,' she moaned". Here then, the big sister's bottom, her feelings about it, or concern about what others might think of it in a swimsuit (which of these isn't explicitly clear), are also a limiting factor.

Body image and self esteem

Body image and self-esteem were also key themes in many of the books examined (8 books). *Cinderella's Bum* (2004) and *A Piece of Cake* (1989) for example, both begin with women who are unhappy with some aspect of their bodies: in the former, the big sister refuses to come swimming as her swimsuit is too tight meaning her bum must have grown; while in the latter Mrs Large exclaims "I'm fat". Body image was also, at least implicitly, referenced in the other stories which focused on body size/shape, even when this wasn't a key focus of the plot. For example, Ogden (*The Yoga Ogre*; 2012) is clearly unhappy at the start of the book, the narration noting he was "worried one night. His jim-jams had grown far too short and too tight! 'How has my tum grown so terribly wide? I only eat TWELVE means a day' Ogden sighed". Similarly, in *Flabby Cat and Slobby Dog* (2010) the characters grow increasingly uncomfortable as they continue with their usual routine (eating and sleeping) and their furniture appears to grow smaller and smaller.

In *Frog is Frog* (1998), the connection to a theme of body image is slightly more abstract, although still comes through strongly. This story takes a slightly different approach from those above; in this book the character is male, and the focus is not on body size/shape or fat in the same sense, although appearance is again key here- in this case alongside physical capacity (the characters' ability to *do* things, as discussed in the previous section). Like *Cinderella's Bum*, *Frog is Frog* begins with an image of a character looking at their reflection – in Frog's case, in the still water of a pond. Interestingly, Frog begins in a place of positive self-esteem, noting how "beautiful" and able he is (figure 5 right), a confidence he loses and then regains over the course of the story, due to comparing himself with others. *Willy the Wimp* (1984) also deals with themes of body image and self-confidence, and like *Frog is Frog*, does so with a male character. Also like Frog, Willy is not concerned with being fat (generally or in terms of specific body parts), but rather in this case with being scrawny and a 'wimp'.

Figure 5. Illustration from *Frog is Frog (1998)*, of a frog gazing at his reflection in the water.

While these stories implicitly deal with bodily appearance, only a couple of the stories directly mention notions of physical attractiveness. In *Frog is Frog*, Frog notes early on that "I am beautiful". In *The Wonky Donkey* (2009), the final repetition notes that "He only had three legs, one eye, he liked to listen to country music, he was quite tall and slim, he smelt really, really bad, that morning he'd got up early and hadn't had any coffee, he was always getting up to mischief… **but he was quite good looking!** He was a **spunky** hanky-panky cranky stinky-dinky lanky honky-tonky winky wonky donkey!" (emphasis in original). Likewise in *Vegetable Glue* (2004), the narrator notes that her Granny is "looking quite good for a hundred and four", a state that is linked to her diet through the following lines: "She'd like you to know why she's so fit and able. She ate all her greens before leaving the table". All of these examples are quite interesting, given the non-traditionally attractive appearance of the characters (whether the donkey's physical disabilities and

crankiness, or the Granny's age), while "beautiful" is an unusual term to describe a male character given its usual feminine connotations (although this is perhaps an artefact of translation from *Frog*'s original Dutch). Possibly in at least some of these examples the contrast between the descriptions and what might be expected helps to create a playful or humorous feel to the story. Additionally, these twists might be being used by the authors/illustrators to deliberately challenge social meanings around attractiveness. Self-esteem, separate from body image, was also a theme in some of the books, often relating to notions of individuality and diversity, which I discuss below.

Diversity, individuality and social relationships

Many of the books explored notions of individuality and diversity, or being different (14 books), particularly through the use of colour or size. For example, in *Blue Gnu* (2012), Boo is "the one and only blue gnu", a state he is particularly proud of, despite the other gnu's lack of admiration. However, when Boo meets Hoo, *another* blue gnu, who would like to be friends, Boo is at first extremely resistant to the idea, and tries to make himself different colours so that he can remain special and unique. He even ends up accidentally trying being grey- like all the other gnu's- and finds himself completely unnoticed, blending right into the crowd. He appears to dislike this situation most of all, and returns to his own blue, coming to terms with the idea that its "nice to have a friend, who's blue like me, and blue like you. Everything's more fun with two". In this story then, body colour is the allegory for exploring being the same, and different, from others (with both benefits and disadvantages). The story seems to suggest that it is good to be different, even if you get teased for it; but at the same time it's nice not to be alone. As discussed above, individuality in terms of colour was also a theme in *Frog is Frog*: Frog is pleased (at least to start with) by

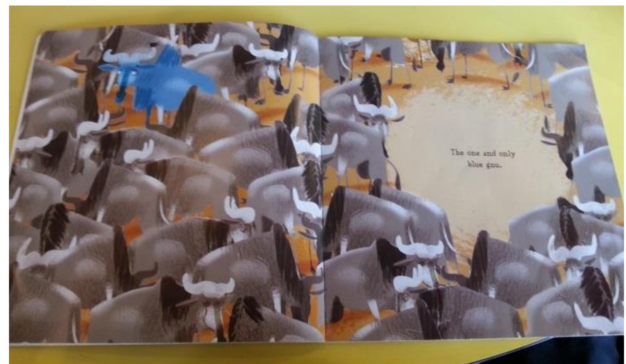

Figure 6. Illustration from *Blue Gnu (2012)*, of a single blue gnu amongst a herd of brown ones.

being green (his “favourite colour”), while Duck is very happy being white, and Pig considers him/herself beautiful too (“I’m pink all over, and pink is my favourite colour”). Favourite colours are also used to explore similar ideas in *Purplicious* (2007), a story about a girl who’s favourite colour is pink, but who finds herself teased by “mean girls” at school who say that pink is “passé” or “over”, and “for babies”; “all the girls like black now”. Pinkylicious struggles with this mocking, slowly eroding her usual pleasure in pink things, and getting “the blues” as she feels different and all alone. However, in the end, she too finds a friend who still appreciates pink (and purple), and finds she is not so alone after all. Likewise Sunday Chutney talks about being “a bit weird”, both in terms of her preferences and her body (e.g. having a “lazy eye”), and the challenges of making friends at a new school. Overlapping with themes of difference, bullying came up in seven of the books.

Being different was also often referenced in terms of being big and small (e.g. *Big and Small, Tell Me What It’s Like To Be Big, Guess How Much I Love You*), as well as other features of the body. For example, *Wheelie Girl (2007)* focuses on a girl with wheels instead of feet, and her search for what she is good at. Most explicitly, *Cinderella’s Bum* (2004) explores diversity of bodies as well as challenging the idea of a single ‘ideal’ bottom. The story not only discusses the pros and cons of different bottom sizes/shapes for different people and occupations, but questions the different status given to bottoms by comparing them with other more acceptably diverse body parts, noting “mouths are all shapes and sizes… noses are all shapes and sizes… and bums are all shapes and sizes too… there are short bottoms… and long bottoms… you can have a long nose and a short bottom or a long bottom and a short nose…”. Interestingly, although not explicitly focusing on diversity, there is a page in *Vegetable Glue* (2004) that also features pictures of noses of all shapes and sizes (without the rest of their body parts), accompanying the words “if our noses fall off, then what would we do?”.

Figure 7. Illustrations from *Cinderella's Bum (2004)*, showing different shapes and sizes of mouths, noses, and bums.

Body size/shape

Clearly, many of the themes described above link in with body shape/size in different ways, although the specific messages provided in each book varied considerably. Constructions of food and eating, especially eating in great quantity, were often (but not always) associated with body size. However, while this was sometimes a matter of gaining size in terms of *fat* with the negative connotations associated with it (*The Yoga Ogre*, 2012; *Flabby Cat and Slobby Dog, 2010*), at other times it involved gaining size and strength in a positive sense (T*he Very Hungry Caterpillar*, 1969; *Willy the Wimp, 1984*), or was simply seen as necessary as a large hungry creature (*The Tiger Who Came to Tea, 1968*). Similarly both physical activity and inactivity were often related to body size, as in *Flabby Cat and Slobby Dog* (2010) where the animals got fatter and fatter through inactivity, and slimmer and leaner (and happier) by getting off the couch and getting some exercise through their adventure. However, while *Fat Ferdie* (2013) aligns with this portrayal of fatness and inactivity when it relates Ferdie's inability to climb the tree to his fatness, in other parts of the story Ferdie is active (rowing a boat, running very fast) with no discernible effect on his size.

Like eating in great quantities, physical activity and ability were associated with body size/shape in diverse ways, beyond just fatness. In some books, the tension was caused by being too small (*Tell Me What It's Like*

to Be Big, 2001*; Big and Small, 2014*), or being physically constrained in other ways (*Wheelie Girl, 2007; Frog is Frog, 1998*). These books are interesting in how they explore the advantages and limitations of diversity, including both ends of the spectrum (being big or small), and *Cinderella's Bum* (2004) similarly suggests benefits to both large and small bottoms. Interestingly the books with clear messages about body image were also diverse, exploring different types of body dissatisfaction, by characters of different genders, and with different morals to the story. Likewise, stories with messages about individuality and diversity took quite different approaches; although colour was a particularly common stand-in for diversity, perhaps as an abstract, and less political, way of representing these sorts of ideas that is hoped to be more accessible to children. It would be interesting then, to explore whether children seem to take in these subtexts or whether they take the story at face value.

Perhaps due to its nature as a medium aimed at children, who are generally physically small relative to many of those around them, body size was a common theme in the picture books sampled; although utilised in diverse and playful ways. This creates an interesting tension: bigness can be desirable as a sign of age, with the increasing capacities and autonomy that this allows; it can be scary when you are smaller and vulnerable; it can be undesirable in terms of fat, and the cultural associations that go with it; and it can also have practical upsides and downsides, as demonstrated in *Big and Small* (2014) *and Tell Me What It's Like To Be Big (2001)*.

Figure 8. Illustration of the bully from *Phoebe & Digger (2013)*.

In terms of body size/shape and characterisation, this varied between different stories. In terms of social relationships, portrayals of bullying were present in seven of the books. None of the instances appeared to be *about* weight; although in *Willy the Wimp,* Willy's scrawny stature at the beginning of the story, and muscular one by the end, change how he interacts with the bullies. However, notably many of the perpetrators of bullying, or people or things described as scary or mean in the stories, were big. For

example, in *Phoebe and Digger* (2013) it is a "big girl with mean teeth" who takes Phoebe's digger (see Figure 8), while Gemma (*The Witch's Children Go To School*, 2008) is scared of Class Three who say "We're the biggest! No one messes with us". *Fat Ferdie* (2013) chases and eats small creatures and little children (or at least attempts to). *Sylvester & Arnold* (2013) follows two 'big tough croc's, who both "put on an ugly tough-croc face"s when they go out to play, and "chase small animals for fun". They have never met until they bump into each other in the story, but just as they are squaring off, an *enormous* croc, "Betty the Bad" arrives, who they are both scared of.

However, although in some stories large or fat characters acted as villains, many of the portrayals were more sympathetic. For example, while Sylvester, Arnold and Betty (*Sylvester & Arnold*) started off as bullies, they were also the lead characters in the story, and over the course of the story changed their ways, becoming friends and learning to put on "a happy friendly croc face" when they go out to play instead (without compromising their character as "big tough croc"s).

Figure 9. Illustration of the girl and her hippo from *Look there's a HIPPOPOTAMUS in the Playground Eating Cake (2007).*

Likewise, while a large size appeared to be a common signifier of something scary, this initial first impression was often challenged. In *Piggy Poggett*, once the little pig starts feeling sick, out in the world all alone, he finds himself surrounded by big and scary things (from a "big, barking DOG", to a "huge, bellowing BULL", to a "great, grumbling TRACTOR" to a "colossal, creaking TREE"). However, when a final "big dark shadow" falls across him and he dares to peek to see what it is, he finds that it is his mother come to rescue him. Additionally, then as in this story, size and strength is sometimes flipped around, a large ally playing the part of the rescuer, or allowing a small child (or animal) to be braver. In *Look There's A HIPPOPOTAMUS in the Playground Eating Cake* (2007), the narrative notes how "school children look very big", highlighting the little girl's nervousness at going to school for the first time. However the narration notes, "My hippopotamus isn't scared of the big kids" and the girl appears to feel brave enough to go

anyway if her hippo is with her, the following words noting “I’m glad my hippopotamus came too” (see figure left). In a similar moment, in the *Witch’s Children Go To School* (2008), the witch’s children helpfully turn Gemma into a great big ogre to help her overcome her nervousness. Likewise, in *Big and Small* (2014), for most of the story it is the little mouse who needs assistance, and the big bear who is capable and brave and rescues him from trouble.

Body size/shape was also often constructed as changeable; although not exclusively so. In the stories like *A Piece of Cake* (1989), and the *Yoga Ogre* (2012), where the characters set out to lose weight via changing eating and exercise habits (and similarly in *Flabby Cat and Slobby Dog* (2010) where this happens unintentionally), key aspects of obesity discourse, including the idea that body weight is controllable through manipulating an ‘energy in=energy out’ equation- and the individual responsibility, and blame, that follow from this understanding- are implicitly reinforced. *Willy the Wimp* (1984) too reinforces notions of body management and control as he appears to successfully transform himself – at least until the ambiguous final page. However, in other stories, characters’ body size appears to be more fixed. For example characters such as the big tiger (the *Tiger Who Came to Tea*, 1968), bear (*Big and Small*, 2014), and hippo (*Look There’s A HIPPOPOTAMUS in the Playground Eating Cake,* 2007), would not be expected to change, given the large nature of the kind of animals they are. Some of the stories also play around with size. For example, throughout *Piggy Poggett* (2009), the little pig is illustrated in different ways, utilising perspective in ways that make him look sometimes big and sometimes small, perhaps demonstrating how he feels in relation to the world around him.

In terms of more implicit messages about body shapes/sizes, I also attended to the art styles and characterisation in the books. While this is clearly (like the writing) an artistic, aesthetic, as well as meaning-making practice, it may also be an illustrative one. Picture books, via their visual nature, must make specific the body shapes/sizes of the characters, and this will have involved deliberate choices by the author and illustrator. These will also offer particular meanings in the contexts of the stories. I will explore these issues

in more depth below, with a more thorough multimodal analysis of a few key books; However, as a whole characters in the books sampled (excluding those which were explicitly fat or scrawny as part of the book's narrative) were generally drawn with an 'average' sort of body shape, neither fat nor thin, although if anything leaning at times to the slightly chubby side. Commonly characters had fairly rectangular, or trapezoidal, mid sections, with either proportional or skinny limbs. In these sorts of illustrations, individuality was usually indicated by differences in hairstyle and colour, face shape, skin colour and clothing, rather than body shape. In books with a more detailed, or less abstract form of illustration, characters were often reasonably curvy with a slightly rounded tummy, with sometimes a bit more diversity in the body shapes of different characters. It would be interesting to systematically compare this to the types of body shapes that dominate other media; however, my overall impression was that there was less emphasis on thinness, and a little more diversity of body shapes than is common in other media such as television and film (though still not a broad range).

Summary

In this chapter, I have attempted to describe the variety of meanings around health and bodies available in my wider sample of books. Notably the ways the key concepts under study were represented in the stories was diverse. Food and eating played a variety of roles in the stories, and was as likely to feature incidentally or as part of socialising as it was to be a focus in relation to food preferences/fussy eating or to being (un)healthy. Physical activity was over twice as often represented incidentally as play or adventures as it was as deliberate exercise. Some of the most common themes involved being different, and self-acceptance. However, in books that focused on health and bodies as key parts of the stories, particular discourses were more obvious. In the next chapter, I further focus in on healthy bodies, exploring a few key books in greater detail in terms of how they demonstrate meaning through a variety of modes, and the discourses they appear to draw on in constructing healthy bodies.

Healthy living in picture books: A Multimodal Discourse Analysis

The seven books I chose to examine in more depth (see Figure 10 below), utilising a multimodal discourse analysis, vary in origin and age, with some relatively recent and others a few decades old. All were available in local school and public libraries. They tell varied stories, but health and/or bodies are a key focus in each. Below, I briefly summarize each story, before exploring key features of the stories and my analysis of how words and images work in different ways to negotiate broader discourses of bodies and healthy living. Of particular interest is how they draw on affect and humour, and the ambiguities and complexities in the messages they offer children.

Figure 10. A table of the 7 books examined in depth with a MMDA, as well as their cover images.

Title	Author(s) & Illustrators	First published	Place	Publisher	Source
The Very Hungry Caterpillar	Eric Carle	1970	UK	World Publishing Company	School & public library
Willy the Wimp	Browne, Anthony	1984	USA	Julia MacRae Books	Public library
The Large Family: A Piece of Cake	Murphy, Jill	1989	UK	Walker Books	School & public library
Cinderella's Bum	Allan, Nicholas	2002	UK	Hutchinson	Public library
Vegetable Glue	Chandler, Susan & Odriozola, Elena	2004	UK	Meadowside	School & public library
Flabby Cat and Slobby Dog	Willis, Jeanne	2010	UK	Andersen	School & public library
The Yoga Ogre	Bently, Peter & Rickerty, Simon	2012	UK	Simon & Schuster	Public library

Book summaries

The Very Hungry Caterpillar - Eric Carle (1969)

The oldest story I examined, and a well-known classic, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* follows the progress of a hungry little caterpillar as he eats through different foods, growing into a big fat caterpillar, before forming a cocoon and finally emerging as a beautiful butterfly. While not focused directly on healthy living, its themes of eating for hunger, foods that make you feel good or bad, and body transformation, provide an interesting counterpoint to more recent stories.

Willy the Wimp - Anthony Browne (1984)

Willy the Wimp follows a chimp who is being pushed around by neighbourhood bullies, until he spots an advertisement, buys a book and sets about transforming himself through diet and exercises, into a muscular hero. This story is predominantly focused on body image and health *behaviours* rather than health directly.

The Large Family: A Piece of Cake – Jill Murphy (1989)

In contrast to the previous two stories, *A Piece of Cake* is explicitly about bodies and healthy living. In this story the mother elephant, concerned about being fat, decides she and her family will embark on a new healthy living regime of diet and exercise. However, they are all pretty miserable with this new way of living; this is then further put to the test when a cake arrives from Granny. They put it away on a high shelf, but when Mrs Large gets tempted in the middle of the night to go and have a slice, she finds the rest of the family have beaten her to it.

Cinderella's Bum – Nicholas Allan (2004)

A small girl listens to her sister complaining about her bottom, and tries to reassure her. After all, noses, mouths, ears and eyes are all different sizes - and so are bottoms. Big bottoms can even be useful, as she explains with some famous examples. However, her sister remains unconvinced, until they realise she was trying to get into the wrong swimsuit all along.

Vegetable Glue – Susan Chandler & Elena Odriozola (2004)

A playful story about the importance of eating your greens; in *Vegetable Glue* a little girl explains that her body parts keep falling off. Here we discover (with a bit of artistic license) that "when you eat up your greens your body makes glue, which keeps all your parts still sticking to you". But she had made a mistake (and only ate cake), with disastrous consequences… until her Grandmother rushes to her rescue with grocery bags full of vegetables, and she learns her lesson.

Flabby Cat & Slobby Dog –Jeanne Willis & Tony Ross (2010)

Flabby Cat and Slobby Dog are very lazy. They sit on the couch watching TV; they eat and eat, and sleep and sleep. And when they wake up, they are surprised to find that the sofa shrunk! Their whole house seems to be shrinking! Or so they like to think. They set off to ask their relatives for help, but through the challenges of their journey, they discover their problem was more about growing than shrinking… and find themselves transformed.

The Yoga Ogre – Peter Bently & Simon Rickerty (2012)

Ogden the Ogre is worried about his tum, and fitting into his jim-jams… so the people advise him to take up a sport. Ogden enthusiastically tries out different sports, with disastrous effects. Finding the perfect sport for a big, bumbling ogre isn't quite as simple as it may seem.

Healthism and a discourse of healthy living

While the stories above are diverse in many ways, dominant discourses of healthy living are apparent in most of them, intertwining ideas of the importance of exercise and being active, of eating a healthy diet, and of displaying a healthy body. On the more explicit end, *A Piece of Cake* (1989) overtly sets this up as a focus of the text, as the mother elephant exclaims on pages one and two, “I’m fat” “we must all go on a diet” and “from now on its healthy living”; This page stands out with a selection of healthy looking vegetables against a white background (see Figure 11 below). *Vegetable Glue* (2004), references health more obliquely and playfully with its notion of eating your greens being crucial to stop your body parts falling off. In both these stories, healthy living involves eating certain things (vegetables particularly), and not eating others (cake, biscuits, crisps). In *A Piece of Cake* (1989) it also involves doing exercise (particularly going for a “nice healthy jog”) and not “sitting around all day”. These themes of food and exercise are reinforced in both images and text. In *Vegetable Glue* (2004), the cover and title pages are decorated with green vegetables; in *a Piece of Cake* (1989), with images of the family jogging and skipping, and the cake that forms a focal point of the story. The illustrations both reinforce the narrative of the story, and also go beyond it. That is, some of the illustrations do not seem to directly relate to the text but instead work to reinforce these underlying themes. For example, Mrs Large appears in many of the illustrations wearing a bright orange tracksuit with “FIT” emblazoned across the front (though fitness isn’t explicitly mentioned in the narrative), and is shown on one page bouncing on a small fitness trampoline though this isn’t mentioned in the text of the story. Likewise diet and exercise are key features in *Willy the Wimp* (1984), *The Yoga Ogre* (2012), and *Flabby Cat & Slobby Dog* (2010).

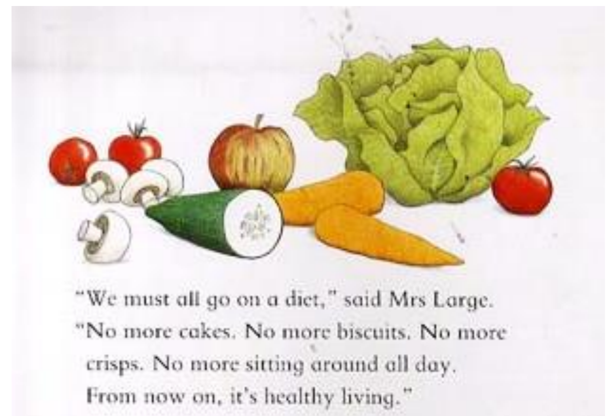

Figure 11. Page from *A Piece of Cake* (1989).

Along with what healthy living ‘is’, the picture books also contained moral messages about healthy living. Constructions of healthy living were not portrayed disinterestedly; rather, tone and narrative provide

particular lessons about what healthy living *means*. Most obviously, particularly in the written text, the stories constructed health in alignment with what has been termed healthism (Crawford, 2006). Healthy things are 'good', and the characters (and readers) are encouraged to do health correctly, to eat good foods and resist unhealthy foods. For example, *Vegetable Glue* (2004) speaks directly to the audience near the end of the book to note, "she ate up her greens, and *I hope you do too*, then you'll never need any vegetable glue" [emphasis added]. However, analysing the images offers a somewhat different message, which I discuss later. In a slightly different approach, *Flabby Cat and Slobby Dog* (2010), and to some degree *The Yoga Ogre* (2012), invite the reader to judge the health behaviours and 'know better' than the characters, allowing a similar healthist message to be portrayed but without explicitly stating it. Here cat, dog, and ogre provide the 'terrible warning', of what comes from unhealthy behaviours, illustrated below.

Healthy bodies and an 'or you'll get fat' discourse

As I discussed in the introduction, previous authors have highlighted the way healthy living discourses have also come to be intertwined with particular messages about the body, and specifically an aversion to fatness. I was particularly interested in the portrayals of bodies in the stories, including body size/shape and fatness specifically, as well as issues of body image. Bodies and body management was raised in the stories in relation to fatness (*A Piece of Cake, 1989; The Yoga Ogre, 2012; Flabby Cat & Slobby Dog,* 2010), as well as in terms of the size/shape of particular body parts (*Cinderella's Bum, 2004*), strength, ability and bullying (*Willy the Wimp, 1984*). Again, these themes were reinforced with symbolic images: for example, mirrors were a notable feature of many of the stories, highlighting this notion of aesthetics, body image and self-surveillance. Likewise bathroom scales appeared in multiple stories, seemingly to reinforce this focus on fatness and weight, even when they weren't part of the text narrative. For example Slobby Dog is standing on scales on the cover of *Flabby Cat and Slobby Dog* (2010); and there are scales pictured in a trash bin on the inner title page of *The Yoga Ogre (2012),* though neither of the stories mention the characters weighing themselves. Here these appear to be visual cues to evoke a focus on body size and shape.

Body size/shape was intimately associated with healthy living *behaviours* in the stories; However interestingly the connection with health was often left implicit. Indeed, it is notable that health often did *not* appear to be the important desired outcome of 'healthy living' in the stories at all. Rather, the result of *un*healthy living to be avoided was getting fat. Again, the stories varied in how explicit this focus was, with Mrs Large exclaiming on the first page "I'm fat" (*A Piece of Cake, 1989*); Ogden 'worried' about the size of his tum (*The Yoga Ogre, 2012*); the big sister in *Cinderella's Bum* (2004) worried about (the size of) her bum; and fatness referenced in the very title of *Flabby Cat and Slobby Dog (2010),* flabby and slobby both evocative terms about fatness, framing the story despite the characters' own naivety where they initially don't understand what is happening to them when their couch and then house appear to shrink. In each of these stories it is the characters' fatness that is the source of the initial tension and concern.

In all of these stories, to at least some degree, fatness is shown as negative and undesirable (though this is also troubled to varying extents as I discuss further below). Alongside Mrs Large's declaration on the first page of *A Piece of Cake* (1989) the image is of her scowling, the rolls of her tummy visible through her frilly nighty. In *The Yoga Ogre* (2012), Ogden is unhappy about his size, the central image on the first page (shown in Figure 12) his round sad face, tummy exposed by his "jim-jams" that are "too short and too tight", and his unhappiness reinforced in the text with words such as "worried" and "terribly". Through words and picture we are invited to notice the size and make-up of Ogden's diet, as well as the size of his tummy, as he stands sadly between teetering piles of pies. Both the rhetorical question and the hyperbole of eating twelve meals (all apparently pies), are used to humorous effect to emphasise Ogden's naivety. Likewise, the

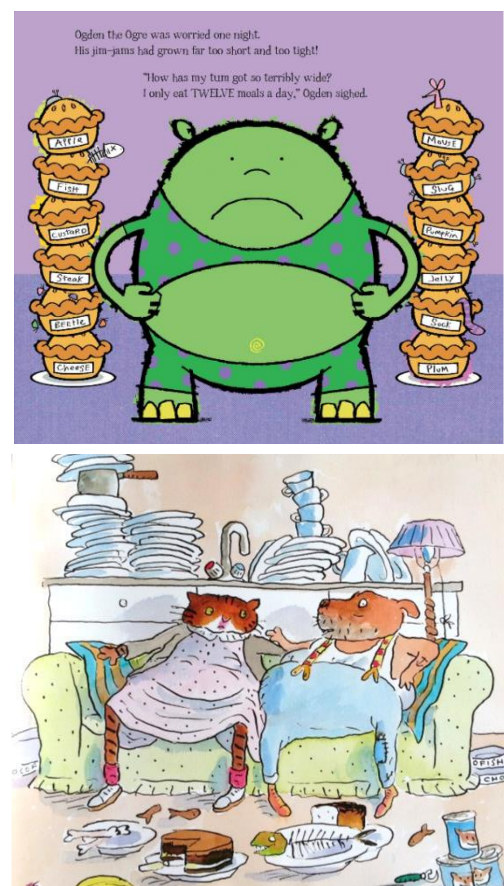

Figure 12. Pages from *The Yoga Ogre (2012)* and *Flabby Cat and Slobby Dog (2010) respectively.*

diverse and unexpected labels on the pies, including “beetle”, “slug” and “sock”, as well as more traditional fillings, reinforce Ogden’s otherness through humour. In contrast, on the opposite page, the narration (through the voice of “the people”) advises Ogden that “overweight ogres should take up a sport”. Exercise (and by inference also eating less) are portrayed as the ‘solutions’ to the ‘problem’ of his fatness.

In *Flabby Cat and Slobby Dog* (2010) the text of the story notes only that they “just couldn’t get comfortable”; yet both their fatness and unhappiness are emphasised in the first image through their facial expressions and posture, tummy’s protruding, legs splayed, downturned mouths and bags under their eyes (see Figure 12 above). *Flabby Cat and Slobby Dog* (2010) again does not mention health, but is clearly focused on a cultural concern with obesity. The reader is invited to surveille and judge the characters’ lifestyle at the start of the story as they “do what [they] always do… so they ate and ate and ate. And they slept and slept and slept. It was all very comforting but when they woke up…”. Here the emphasis is not just on overeating, but an apparent obsession with food: the framed pictures on the wall are of food, the floor around them is littered with food of all sorts, often half-eaten, as well as dirty dishes, and they are shown stuffing whole fish and chicken in their mouths with crazed expressions on their faces (see Figure 12). Here the affordances of the visual images go further than would be culturally appropriate in the written text, allowing a suggestion of depravity and linking fatness to laziness, messiness and mania. Further the images evoke an affective response of disgust in the reader.

Likewise, their inactivity and laziness is emphasised not just by sleeping and sleeping, but by the imagery of sitting on the couch and watching TV; seemingly drawing on the cultural symbolism of the ‘couch potato’ and modern ‘obesogenic’ lifestyles (Burrows, 2010b). The story repeatedly notes the ‘comforting’ nature of this routine- and yet as it goes on cat and dog become more and more *un*comfortable as their sofa, the room, and finally the whole house seem to mysteriously keep shrinking around them. However, the text invites the reader to question this understanding of the situation noting: “or so they liked to think” and “or so they imagined”. Instead, the reader is invited to feel knowing; it is not the house that is shrinking, but they that are getting bigger and fatter, a clear consequence of their lifestyle. Here the story plays with the

'common sense' knowledge that eating too much and being inactive cause you to become fatter, by taking this to hyperbolic extremes. Through images and text it reinforces this taken-for-granted understanding of health and bodies.

In obesity discourse, a change in health behaviours (diet and physical activity) is constructed as the 'solution' to fatness, reinforcing an understanding that getting rid of your fatness is a desirable and achievable goal. While each of the stories I have discussed here seem to reference obesity discourse, and a desire to lose weight, interestingly only in *Flabby Cat and Slobby Dog* (2010) do the characters *actually* lose weight. In contrast, despite Mrs Large's unhappiness with her weight, and new healthy living regime, the elephants' weight in *A Piece of Cake* (1989) doesn't change. Instead we see Mrs Large gazing sadly down at the dial as she stands on their bathroom scales halfway through the story; on the other page Mr Large comments "we aren't getting any thinner, dear". Likewise, although unhappiness with his size/weight is set up as the motivating factor in *The Yoga Ogre* (2012), Ogden's body doesn't change within the story, as he searches for a sport to play, or contemplates having to "try another way to get thinner" such as going on a diet. Here then, the stories diverge in important ways. *A Piece of Cake* (1989) and *the Yoga Ogre* (2012) introduce a slightly more critical perspective, which I explore in the next section.

In contrast, in *Flabby Cat and Slobby Dog* (2010) an anti-obesity message is unwavering; a change in diet and exercise has an unmistakeable effect on the characters' bodies, and is starkly positive. When cat and dog are forced out of their comfortable routine and rapidly shrinking house ("or so they thought") they end up going on an adventure where they have to hunt for food and water, and are "too busy trying to stay alive" to eat and eat and sleep and sleep as they are used to. Again, it is through the images rather than the text that we see their bodies start to change, becoming thinner and thinner, until finally the text draws our attention to it on the second to last page: "… the wolf was Slobby Dog all strong and slim from climbing and walking. And the tiger was Flabby Cat all sleek and trim from striding and stalking". On the penultimate page they are shown gazing into a mirror at their transformed selves as the text notes: "they gazed at their reflections and for the first time in a long time, they felt really comfortable with who they were. All of

which had nothing to do with the size of their sofa… and everything to do… with **getting off it**!" (see Figure 13). Through the use of the mirror, a focus on bodily *aesthetics* is reinforced, while the text links this with how the characters feel. Further, we see more subtle changes through the illustrations: their movements become more active and capable, as well as more gender-conforming, they are no longer the butt of jokes in the drawings, and we no longer see the mess of their house around them, the floor and walls around the sofa suddenly stark and clean. Additionally, while the early images of cat and dog are noticeable for their gender non-conformity, this too is shed as part of their transformation. For example, Cat's posture and positioning as she sprawls on the couch on pages one and three with legs apart contrasts strongly with one of the final images of the story where she reclines elegantly along the back of the couch, legs crossed, and skirts tidily smoothed (see Figure 13). Through the images of the story, we get a sense that they have shed not just their fatness, but also their laziness and unhappiness; likewise, gender is invoked in the images alongside these other characteristics to position both cat and dog as 'other' when fat, and to emphasise their transformation over the course of the story not just of body but also of character, becoming good, healthy, feminine and masculine citizens.

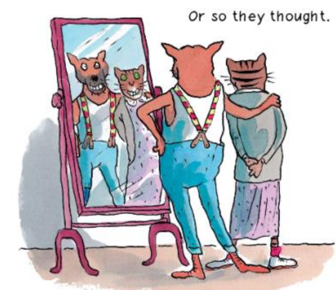

Figure 13. Illustrations from near the end of *Flabby Cat and Slobby Dog (2010)* of the dog and cat now sleek and trim.

Concerns about modern urban lifestyles and the 'obesity epidemic' are visualised through cat and dog who are so alienated from their 'natural' state that they not only spend all their time on the couch watching TV and feasting on an easy bounty of food, but don't even notice the mice living under their noses that would 'naturally' be their prey. Through their adventure they return both physically and metaphorically to their 'natural' state as they become 'wild wolf' and 'cunning tiger', shedding not just their fat but their domestication and all the problems of modern urban life that come with it.

Notably, *Flabby Cat and Slobby Dog* (2010) and *The Yoga Ogre* (2012) were both published in the 2010s, in the height of concern about the 'obesity epidemic', and most clearly reproducing the assumptions of obesity discourse. It is interesting that only the oldest story I examined, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (1969), shows growth and fatness in a positive light, part of growing up from a tiny caterpillar to one big enough to make a cocoon and transform into a butterfly.

Health vs pleasure?

One of the most notable features to come out of the analysis of the books was the contradictions inherent in the stories. Most notably, despite healthist messages being clearly apparent in the books, they were also inherently undermined, highlighting a key tension in the stories between morality and pleasure. While healthy things were portrayed as what you *should* eat and do, they were also portrayed as dull, unappealing, and even downright unpleasant.

When Mrs Large announces her family's new healthy living regime (*A Piece of Cake, 1989*), she begins by listing all the things there will be "no more of"; overleaf, the main illustration of the page shows the family gathered round the rubbish bin, an angry looking (mother) elephant holding up the lid while her family meekly bring various food items to be thrown away. Combined with the stark image of fruits and vegetables, the initial impression of healthy living here seems primarily one of deprivation. On the page as a whole, we get more of an impression of what health is *not*, rather than what it *is*. Health means *not* eating things like cake, nor relaxing on the couch in front of the television. Likewise later images of their "healthy tea" are far from appealing, from a greenish watery soup and glass of water, to a sad looking sardine and small pile of grated carrot, sparse and limp on a plate.

While the words of the story are subtly subversive, they are generally positive: primarily portraying what the elephants say aloud, particularly Mrs Large. For example, when Mr Large comes home from work and goes to turn on the TV:

> "No you're not, dear," said Mrs Large. "You're off for a nice healthy jog round the park, followed by your tea- a delicious sardine with grated carrot".
> "I can't wait," said Mr Large".

This tepid enthusiasm is clearly undermined by the context of the images; in this case, the expression on Mr Large's face as he sets off out the door, echoed by the stormy sky above him. While the new diet and exercise regime is described as "nice" and "delicious", in context these come off as somewhat sarcastic. Likewise, in the image on the previous page only Mrs Large is smiling as she leads her family off on one of their "nice healthy jog"s; the children's expressions showing various levels of dismay, with the littlest trailing sadly behind. On the following page we see the result even more starkly as things come to a head, the family collapsed on the couch in exhaustion, alongside the words "it was awful".

Similarly, throughout *Flabby Cat and Slobby Dog* (2010), cat and dog look just as miserable on their adventure as they did at home; and perhaps unsurprisingly, given the story describes them struggling to stay alive in the wild, to find enough food and water to live and not get eaten by circling sharks, or fall off a cliff. It is not until the final page, having seen their transformation in a mirror, that they look happy, shown rejoicing in their new thin bodies.

Likewise in *Willy the Wimp* (1984) we see Willy embark on an exercise regime to become less of a 'scrawny, skinny-chested, pathetic weakling', from jogging, to dancing, to boxing; while the text is simple and descriptive, through the illustrations we get a window into Willy's experiences and feelings, his expressions ranging from glum to embarrassed as he tries each activity. The illustration of him jogging (see Figure 14 right) echoes the ones from *A Piece of Cake* (1989) mentioned above, looking miserable under gloomy grey skies. In these constructions, exercise becomes a chore, and a tool to achieve a desired body shape, rather than a pleasure and goal in and of itself. Again here, the affordances of the visual mode allow the images to offer a negative construction of physical activity that would sound strange if stated explicitly in the text.

Figure 14. Illustration from *Willy the Wimp (1984).*

In contrast, the unhealthy things referenced (eating unhealthy foods like cake, sitting around, watching TV), are constructed in the texts as antithetical to health, and so to be avoided- but also pleasurable and desirable, particularly through the images. Cake played a significant role in the stories, as a symbol of this tension. In *A Piece of Cake* (1989), the family receive a cake from their grandmother, and are pictured crowded around it hopefully, before it is put away in a cupboard for visitors. This cake then forms the turning point of the story, around which their new "healthy living" regime crumbles, as "everyone kept thinking about the cake". Even Mrs Large proves not to be immune, and ends up sneaking downstairs for a piece. In contrast to the limp vegetables of earlier dinners, the images of the cake are bright and tempting with pink icing and cream, and cherries on top. The shadowed images of Mrs Large sneaking down to the kitchen, and then her pink cheeked embarrassment as she is caught in the act, hint at guilty pleasure, followed by a bright happy image of the family smiling and hugging each other as they gather around the final piece of the cake, giving in to this temptation. Again the stark contrast with the drooping expressions of the elephants in earlier images of mealtimes is notable here.

In *Vegetable Glue* (2004), the narrator explains how she was "quite silly" and "made a mistake", as she "wouldn't eat good things. I only ate… cake!". While the words here are playfully negative (silly, mistake), the reader is invited in by the build up ("I only ate…") and turns the page to find an extravagant double page spread, a banquet table filled with beautiful cakes of all shapes and sizes, untouched and waiting to be eaten, the narrator smiling broadly as her dog peeks out from amid the cakes, and the single word: "… **cake!**". The combined effect of image and text here is one of extravagance and pleasure, the large and bold typeset, exclamation mark as well as unusual isolation of a single word suggesting "cake!" is to be read with a certain relish; likewise, the girl's smiling expression, the detailed image, and brighter colours stand out in this image. In contrast, later, as the text advises "she ate all her greens, and I hope you do too…" we again see our narrator sitting up at a table: this time small and stark, a single dish piled high with a single food (peas) and a glass of water, no table cloth, little colour or variety, and a blank, ambiguous expression on the narrators' face as she chews her food; Her dog looks somewhat dismally at a single pea on the floor, and even the cushion she is sitting on is smaller (see Figure 15).

Figure 15. Illustrations from different pages of *Vegetable Glue (2004).*

Despite the moral advice in the text (an adult perspective), taken multimodally the images seem to offer a wholly different message to the viewer, inviting them to engage emotionally. Cake is fun, colourful, and happy, whereas vegetables are plain, unappealing and bare. Both stories set cake up as something that should be avoided, and yet at the same time, construct it as highly desirable, pleasurable and fun. In both cases, this tension is created through the contrast between words and images. It is through the *pictures* particularly that we get a glimpse at what the characters are feeling, crucial for conveying the emotional tone of the story; and further, through the images that this tension (between health and pleasure) is naturalised and unquestioned. Further, the way in which adults read children's books in an exaggerated manner, highlighting humour, is also likely to increase the affective response, and reinforce these binaries.

What we see echoed throughout the stories then, in terms of affect, is a notion of hard and unpleasant physical exercise, and healthy but unappetising vegetables, as necessary to be endured in order to achieve health-as-thinness; absent in comparison is a celebration of the joy of movement, or how delicious healthy food can be, or even (somewhat surprisingly) any explicit discussion of balance and moderation. *A Very Hungry Caterpillar* (1969) provides an interesting contrast here. The foods the caterpillar eats, in increasing quantities, are presented in a fairly neutral way. The images show bright colourful appealing fruit that the little caterpillar munches holes through. Only on the Saturday, does the caterpillar eat anything other than fruits and vegetables- and afterwards he doesn't feel very well. Yet on Sunday he returns to a "nice green leaf" and feels "much better". The variety of party foods eaten on Saturday are shown in a similar, colourful

appealing way, though the large quantity and variety evoke humour through their contrast to the caterpillar's previous meals. However, the lesson here is a gentle and sympathetic one, encouraging children to notice how this kind of feast might make them feel. When contrasted with the more recent stories, the lack of focus on fatness as a negative consequence of overindulging is particularly notable. Indeed, as noted earlier, this story briefly mentions fatness but in a positive light, part of growing up big and strong and fat enough to transform.

Stories to encourage critical thinking?

As I have mentioned, the stories discussed here all clearly have different agendas and messages, and are situated within the socio-cultural concerns of their time. Indeed, a few of them clearly trouble a healthist focus on healthy eating and exercise and the stigmatisation of fatness, attempting to encourage children to think critically about healthy living and body size/shape. In contrast to *Flabby Cat and Slobby Dog* (2010), with its clear anti-obesity messages, the ideas in *The Yoga Ogre* (2012) and *A Piece of Cake* (1989) for example are more complex. As an adult reader, the critique of widespread concerns about body weight is clear in these stories. *Cinderella's Bum* (2004) and *Willy the Wimp* (1984) likewise address issues of body image, and how too much concern with the size and shape of your body, and what they sell you in advertisements, might not be a good thing. In *Cinderella's Bum*, the narrator argues that bottoms, like other body parts, come in different shapes and sizes- and that's okay. Further, she argues, big bottoms can be useful. In the illustrations we see exaggerated lips, mouths and noses, as well as bottoms of different historical and fictional figures, in a light-hearted attempt to normalise diversity.

In *the Yoga Ogre* (2012), throughout the story Ogden does his best to follow 'the people's' advice, though each activity he tries ends up going wrong. The contradictory nature of the advice feels unfair. Though it doesn't address the issue directly, and ends ambiguously, the story is sympathetic to Ogden as it shows him being stigmatized for being different; too big and fat to fit in. Poor Ogden seems to be in a lose-lose

situation: to lose weight (and attempt to conform) he must take up a sport; but his difference means the people grow angry with him for each one he tries, and he is forbidden yoga and “ball games of every sort”. Despite his attempts to follow the people’s advice and do health correctly, he just can’t seem to get it right. Like many other stories featuring fat characters, *The Yoga Ogre* (2012) is rife with humour at Ogden’s expense, particularly focused around his diet, heaviness, physical size and inability. However, the tone of the story is predominantly sympathetic: Despite being an ogre Ogden is not scary or monstrous, nor does he have the manic dishevelled look of *Flabby Cat and Slobby Dog (2010)*. While still ‘other’, an outsider that is clearly different from ‘the people’ (who despite token differences of gender and skin colour are strikingly uniform in appearance), he is drawn a cute, cuddly kind of fat, and is a sympathetic character throughout the story. His isolation is displayed prominently when things come to a head, and after being banished from yoga and ‘ball games of every sort’ he is pictured at opposite ends of the bench from ‘the people’, a gap in-between, and all wearing sad expressions (illustration shown in Figure 16). At a deeper level then, this story seems to offer a gentle challenge to the stigmatisation and dehumanisation of fatness.

Figure 16. Illustration from *The Yoga Ogre (2012)*

Likewise, in *A Piece of Cake* (1989), despite the family’s best efforts, the family do not lose weight. Further, they are all a bit miserable under the new regime. The text notes, “it was awful…’, as we see the family sprawled exhaustedly on the sofa together. Despite the mother’s concern about being fat as a bad thing to be avoided, this is troubled at different parts of the story. For example, the children reframe their mother’s fatness as “cuddly” and “just right”, and later suggest the idea that “perhaps elephants are *meant* to be fat”. Initially Mrs Large dismisses this idea, but later comes round to agreeing. There is a cultural familiarity in this story, published in the 1980s, and the ways in which healthism places responsibilities on women and mothers in particular to be concerned with health and bodies, as well as caretakers of family weight/health. Additionally, the story seems to suggest that too much of a focus on weight and ‘healthy living’ as

prescribed by a 'healthy weight' discourse might be missing out on other important values, such as pleasure and relaxation, and togetherness as a family, with clear feminist influences of the time.

However, despite what *could* be positive, critical messages about health and bodies, the contradictions inherent within and between the stories mean the overall effect of these books is somewhat ambiguous. *A Piece of Cake* (1989) and *The Yoga Ogre* (2012), by starting from a concern about fatness as bad, may model this for young readers. While each of these books troubles the simplicity of healthy weight discourses, there is a danger that given the wider social context, such stories may end up simultaneously reinforcing them. It is hard to know whether children will pick up the subtler critiques later in the stories, or only see the repetition of a familiar construction of fatness as undesirable. Further, Mrs Large's immediate response to the idea that elephants might be "*meant* to be fat" ("Nonsense! We mustn't give up now") seems to draw on a healthy weight discourse to suggest that achieving thinness (and by inference health) is simply a matter of willpower. Given the powerful position of this discourse in society, how might this then colour children's understanding later in the story when she does eventually agree ("I think you're probably right, dear")? That is, is this authentic agreement or did she really just 'give up'?

Likewise, *The Yoga Ogre* (2012), *Willy the Wimp* (1984) and *Cinderella's Bum* (2004) all end ambiguously. While by their expressions the people seem resigned to Ogden having taken up jogging at the end of *The Yoga Ogre*, and Ogden is once more enjoying himself, whether the issue of his too-tight jim-jams was ever resolved is left unsaid. Likewise, it isn't really clear why this activity should be any different from the others, as it still seems to be causing widespread disruption to the town. In *Willy the Wimp*, Willy often looks unhappy and uncomfortable as he tries out different kinds of diet and exercises, from jogging to dancing, to weight-lifting (as prescribed by the book he bought from an advertisement), but he does eventually get bigger and stronger, and is able to scare off the neighbourhood bullies. On the final page, however, feeling proud of himself ('a hero'), he walks into a pole and immediately apologises. Interestingly in this final image, he is drawn as he was at the start, no longer big and muscular; seemingly returned to his old self, in both body and character. Once again then, the ending is ambiguous, and open to interpretation. In

Cinderella's Bum, despite the little sister's arguments about it being okay to be different shapes and sizes, the big sister remains unconvinced until finally they realise that she was trying to get into the wrong swimsuit all along. This 'twist' ending seems to undermine the positive messages preceding it.

How can these stories be read?

In the stories I have discussed above, the characters' behaviours, and choices in relation to food and activities, have consequences for the body. These stories show a focus not just on healthy eating, but eating particular foods - specifically vegetables, and not just physical activity but deliberate vigorous exercise such as jogging. Further, they explore and collapse the relationship between body shape (specifically fatness/thinness) and health, where the goal of healthy living is presented as being non-fat. The stories reinforce discourses of health that intertwine with the body, suggesting that we can 'read' a fat body as not only unhealthy but also lacking in willpower (as in *A Piece of Cake,* 1989) and even stupid, greedy and lazy (as in *Flabby Cat and Slobby Dog,* 2010). Often these ideas were implicit in the stories, rather than specifically stated, utilising the affordances of the visual mode perhaps in order to be more culturally acceptable. However, problematically, this means that 'healthy weight' or 'obesity' discourses were often constructed as taken-for-granted truths in the stories, presented through the visual elements of the stories: what was shown but often left unsaid.

The use of dramatic irony, as in *Flabby Cat and Slobby Dog* (2010)*,* emphasising the naivety of the fat characters in contrast to the 'knowing' audience, not only places responsibility (and blame) for taking care of their own health on the individual through individual lifestyle choices, but also reinforces a construction of fat people as ignorant or stupid. Following on from this, complexities and structural inequalities can be glossed over in favour of a focus on education as the solution to obesity as a social problem; and stigma can come to be accepted or even encouraged as helpful to encourage people to take individual responsibility, despite the lack of evidence of success, and moral obscurity, of this approach.

While some of the stories introduce more critical perspectives, challenging a healthist and fatphobic version of 'healthy weight' discourse, these are not without their limitations, as I have argued. *A Piece of Cake* (1989), for example simultaneously models a (feminine) concern with fatness, and unsustainable diet and exercise changes to try to combat it, at the same time as it suggests that fatness, at least for elephants, might sometimes be natural and inevitable. *The Yoga Ogre* (2012) likewise both reinforces anti-fat discourse and diet culture, at the same time as it subtly challenges the stigmatisation that can accompany it, and the lose-lose situations this can create for people. Finally, there was a tension in all of the books between healthy living as important but unpleasant, and other considerations such as pleasure and rest. It is interesting that only the oldest story, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (1969) focuses on food in relation to hunger. Likewise, it was the only story in which growth and fatness were positive. Given growing bigger is an important part of childhood, this will be an interesting tension to explore in children's talk about bodies and health.

Analysing the stories multimodally was particularly useful for highlighting these contradictions within and between the stories. In this sample of books, health was constructed as simultaneously simple (eat good things, don't eat bad things, and you will be healthy and non-fat) and also hard and unpleasant. The combined effect seems to tell children: you *should* eat well and exercise, but you won't enjoy it; and if you fail (which you probably will) it is your own fault, for being weak willed. There is an irony in how we seem to be simultaneously trying to encourage children to eat well and exercise, at the same time as we teach them that to do so will make them miserable.

The ambiguous nature of many of the stories could make them a useful tool for working with children, a springboard for discussions about the complexities of bodies and health. However, how children are likely to interpret these ambiguities and contradictions is unclear. Following on from this analysis of the books themselves, I therefore conducted discussions with small groups of children, reading some of these stories together and talking about how the children understood and made sense of them. I discuss this in the next section.

Discussion group analysis: How did the children make sense of the books?

Unsurprisingly, children responded to the books in a variety of ways within the discussion groups. It is clear in their responses how they make sense of the books in the context of their wider experiences and understandings of the world, including (but not limited to) bodies and healthy living, as well as simply enjoying the story. Knowing healthy bodies was my focus in talking to them, and what I wanted them to teach me about, they did note these ideas in the stories; at times excited to have their own answers reinforced, or to argue for or against what was happening in the stories. However, at other times they found the potential links to health too obscure or unconvincing. They also brought a wide range of other ideas into their reading of the stories.

The Large Family: A Piece of Cake

A Piece of Cake (1989) was the story children most clearly related to 'healthy living', aligning with their own answers to what 'being healthy' means. For example, even from just looking at the cover, Piper had some clear ideas of what the story was going to be about:

> Piper: Um_ they're_ [scratching her head] eating cake? [grins at Ria]
> Ria: Mm? [both laugh]
> Piper: and they're unhealthy
> Ria: Mm?
> Piper: And then they get healthy? by eating_ fruit? and veggies?

As I have argued in the previous section, this story (at least at the start) sets up a clear picture of healthy living, words and images combining to reinforce ideas of eating fruits and vegetables, avoiding unhealthy foods (the elephants pictured throwing things into the bin with the words "no more cakes, biscuits, crisps"), and doing deliberate vigorous exercise (going for "a nice healthy jog"). On reading the first few pages Hannah exclaimed "this'll give us our idea"; Liam: "They need exer -scise!"; Piper: "That sounds healthy"; James: "Hmm_ I can copy this"; and Tayla: "I <u>talked</u> about those! I (was) meaning all of those [drawing a

circle with her finger encompassing the picture of fruit and vegetables on the page] that, that… [pointing at each item]". In line with the story, children understood the elephants going on a diet to mean eating "good", "healthy stuff" (e.g. Chloe; Levi; Piper; Riley), and not eating "treats" or "bad" food (e.g. Aimee & Lara); and generally thought Mrs Large had a good idea of what being healthy entails.

In one discussion, Hannah and Liam went further at being the teachers themselves, borrowing this book to hold up to the camera and tell an imaginary audience:

> Hannah: Now we did it, now we- now we know what we can't eat…
>
> Liam: Rule number one! Listen to that book!
>
> Liam: Eat those vegetables
> Hannah: But not the cooki- [draws the page away again so she can look at it] but not- but not the yucky- but not the lollies that's in the picture - bye bye!
>
> And later…
>
> Liam: [comes to stand up in front of the camera again] listen to that guys. Go for a healthy jog! That's what you should do [nodding and smiling]
> Hannah: like this [nudges Liam out the way, and demonstrates running on the spot, with her tongue out, panting]
>
> Hannah: Exercise! Good, good, good!

Interestingly Hannah and Liam's reading of the story was all about these 'good' health messages: eating vegetables (specifically mentioning broccoli later on), not eating sweet foods (specifically cookies and lollies), and going jogging. Hannah summed the story up to the camera as "that's why don't eat that much cake or you'll get fat bye!".

However, while all the children easily connected with these ideas of what healthy living entailed, the diet and exercise regimen the elephants undertake in the story also elicited mixed responses. For example, children expressed some qualms about the healthy dinners:

> Ria: What do you guys think of that?
> Lara: [leans over the table to point at the picture] yucky, yucky …{(I don't like mushrooms) [shaking head]
>
> Nicole: Ewww! Sardines! [drops her face onto the table]

In both of these discussions, the healthiness of the dinners was at tension with their yumminess or appeal for children, with both Lara and Nicole expressing their distaste for particular items. Lara and Aimee were also confused by some of the more ambiguous items being thrown out at the beginning of the story, particularly bread:

> Lara: {What's that? what's that?
> Aimee: None of that_... or um...
> Lara: No bread!
> Aimee: [sits down and finishes in a rush] or you'll get fat
> Ria: No bread? Hm...
> Lara: Yeah because look [points to the illustration] there's bread...
> Ria: Ah yeah, because that's what they're {throwing in the rubbish
> Lara: {Bread is healthy. Bread is healthy...
> Ria: Hm...
> Aimee: Well I have it in my sandwiches, with butter

Likewise, children picked up on the tension in the story, where healthy eating and exercise are presented as an unpleasant chore (to avoid fatness), one that is obviously taking a toll on the family of elephants. The elephants in the story were clearly unhappy as the story went on, and participants made sense of this in different ways: suggesting tiredness, hunger, thirst, and missing their usual pleasure/resting activities like watching TV, as well as that "they didn't like the <u>food</u>" (Aimee). For example, Nicole, Tayla and Chloe note:

> Ria: So why do you think they all felt awful?
> […]
> Nicole: Um, Because they runned around the park two times and they needed a drink
> Ria: you think they might be thirsty? Mm
> Nicole: and like_ <u>wasted</u> [smiles]
>
> Tayla: Cos they did *too much exercising_* [in a drawn-out voice, slumping over sideways in her chair like she's exhausted]
> Ria: {too much exercising?
> Chloe: {and they're <u>tired</u>

In comparison to the 'healthy teas', participants showed much more enthusiasm for the cake in the story. As in the story, the cake was desirable and appealing for children, with many going further to show this through their actions as well as their comments, miming eating the cake themselves. Many of the children clearly empathised with the temptation it represented, with comments such as: "Ooh yummy- cake!"

(Lara), "I love cake!" (Piper), and "they're all after the cake" (Riley). However, others focused on the importance of resisting this temptation:

> "I must have a piece of that cake."
> William: Oooh! no no no! [in a sing-song scolding voice]
> Ria: Mm?
> William: You should never have a piece of cake when there's... when the other people are asleep
> Ria: Mm
> William: Otherwise they'll wake up and they'll ring the po-lice!
> Ria: It doesn't sound a very nice thing to do, does it?
>
> Ria: [pauses] what do you think of that?
> Levi: Thi_nk it's bad?
> Ria: {yeah? it's bad?
> Levi: {that they're having it again?
> Ria: That she's having cake? So why is that?
> Levi: Because_ [1] I actually forgot [smiling shyly]

Interestingly, William argues mainly against the *rudeness* of sneaking down to eat the cake without the rest of the family; while Levi can't quite articulate why he thinks it's bad. The children seem to also bring in other familiar parental discourses to make sense of the story, for example around the importance of not "being greedy" (Isabella), of being kind and sharing, and that sweet things are okay as occasional "treats".

In terms of constructions of the body, children often related the elephants' healthy living behaviours to either avoiding fatness or occasionally growing big and strong, two 'healthy body' discourses that I discuss in more detail in the next chapter. The more critical idea raised in this story that 'maybe elephants are *meant* to be fat' was fairly divisive between different groups, some agreeing and some rejecting the idea.

Summing up this story, Ada and Isabella noted:

> Ria: So what did you think of that story?
> Ada: (good)
> Isabella: It was_ healthy?
> Ria: Yeah?
> […]
> Isabella: The little baby was wobbling and-
> Ada: wibbelly wobbelly
> Isabella: and that um one was healthy, so they can get healthy? cos they ate um vegetables what's are healthy, and fruit?

The Yoga Ogre

Out of the stories I read with participants, *The Yoga Ogre* (2012) seemed to be particularly appealing. Children seemed to enjoy the round cartoon ogre- often choosing to draw their own version of an ogre- as well as talking about different sports, the playful prose and the humour throughout the story. From the beginning, they liked the rhyming title, often repeating it a few times, experimenting with the sounds. The focus on kinds of physical activities seemed to appeal to the children, often prompting them to demonstrate their own moves, or talk to me about what sports they play and enjoy.

> Ria: So this one is called *The Yoga Ogre*
> Aimee: The y- I can do yoga! I can do a handstand but I can't last it very long [smiling]
> Ria: Yeah? [laughs]
> Lara: I'll tr- I can do cartwheels that- mine's not very good [getting up]
> Aimee: [also gets up to demonstrate her moves]
>
> Liam: Basketball! - [pointing to the 'people' dressed ready for different sports] basketball... [then both children together] hockey, soccer!
> Hannah: We play soccer- we won yesterday

Again, this story begins with a clear 'problem'; Ogden complaining about his 'jammies' being too small as he talks about what he eats, pictured standing amid towers of pies. Children readily responded to the exaggerated *quantity* of Ogden's diet, and their knowledge of pies as an unhealthy food, the combined text and illustrations effectively drawing them in to offer Ogden advice from their own health knowledge:

> Ria: [reading] I only eat TWELVE meals a day, Ogden sighed.
> Lara: That's too much
> Aimee: That's too much
> Ria: Too much?
> Lara: [leans over to point] and pies are not healthy
> Ria: <u>Ah</u>...
>
> Jane: [loudly] That means you're gonna be fa_t!
>
> Levi: Okay, that's heaps.
> Ria: That's heaps? [2] Do you think that's too much?
> Levi: [nods]
> Ria: So do you think that was a healthy diet?
> Levi: Hmm_ no.
> Jack: That is not a healthy diet.
> [...]
> Ria: So, what do you think he should do?
> Levi: Stop eating twelve a day

Participants identified Ogden's diet of twelve pies a day as too much, and that he should stop. However, where exactly the line was of what was too much created some more in depth discussion:

> Ria: [reading] Perhaps I could only have TEN pies for dinner…
> Chloe: {instead of twelve
> Ria: {what do you think?
> Chloe: {Get five-
> Tayla: {No__!
> Chloe: Get five- wait. Get_
> Ria: No?
> Chloe: One, one. One for you.
> Tayla: No. No, don't eat any more, and then you'll get smaller. Eat little bites of it [holding up finger and thumb close together]. If you don't finish it you can eat it tomorrow.
> Chloe: Just eat_
> Tayla: If you don't finish it today you can eat it tomorrow.
> Chloe: Just eat… [1] five bites of the pie [laughs]
> Ria: So how do you know what a good amount to eat is?
> Tayla: A good amount is like… [2] two?
>
> William: No! You only get about… [pauses briefly to think] five pies! [holding up the fingers on one hand]
> Ria: Five pies?
> William: five pies for- You only get about one pie, that would be enough
> Ria: Oh one pie?
> William: And you only get- (a plate of pudding) [sweeping an arm]
> Ria: So how do you know... how much is enough?
> William: If you're having a pie you need a healthy pie [holding up a finger]
> Ria: Mm?
> William: So like, you need- vitamins, like there's vitamen-A-vitamen-B-vitmen-C-vitamen d- and_ you also need to have med'cine with it and fruit and (??)

In both of these discussions, the children seem to slowly dial back their suggestions of a 'good amount'. William also switches from focusing only on *quantity* (how much) to also examining *what* – suggesting the idea of a "healthy pie" and even going into more detail with the need for different vitamins.

Likewise, there seemed to be a tension in children's talk at times between eating as the problem and eating as the solution. This is apparent between Hannah and Liam's comments below, where Liam reiterates eating vegetables as a solution, while Hannah seems to be worried that eating more things might make Ogden fatter:

> Hannah: ooooh... look what he did! look what he did over here
> Ria: [reading] The people cried STOP! as he flattened five lampposts, three cars, and a shop.
> Hannah: Oh ()
> Ria: What's happening?

Liam: He's breaking everything
Ria: Mm
Hannah: Even the flowers
Liam: He has to stop. Just eat some vegetables!
Ria: You think he needs to eat some vegetables? [as she turns the page]
Hannah: {(Ah, that would make him a little bit fat)

Alongside diet, the story also raises the idea of exercise, as 'the people's advice to Ogden to 'take up a sport'; Some readily agreed with this suggestion, while others seemed to find it confusing, as health seemed to be constructed as sole-ly related to food. For example, this tension is clear between Isabella and Ada's comments below:

Isabella: =Not good
Ria: Not good?
Isabella: No. Because he fought that- stuff would make him healthy but- food and drinks make him healthi-er?
Ria: Mm
Ada: Mm [nodding to herself] {<u>and</u> (all-the) sports sometimes healthy
Isabella: {How d'you spell 'from'?
Ria: And- what was that?
Ada: {Doing sports is sometimes healthy…

While Isabella takes a stance that the sports were a distraction, because food and drink are what make you healthier, Ada argues that sports can also be part of being healthy. Others also agreed with the importance of exercise:

Ria: [reading] Jim jams too tight and too short? Overweight ogres should take up a sport.
William: He should actually exercise!
Ria: Yeah? {He should exercise?
William: [waves his fists] {(he could actually-)
Ria: Why is that?
William: at the gym. (Like- I could be like an exercise tape) [gets up and starts running on the spot]
Ria: Ooh- Like running? that's pretty cool. And why is-
William: [still running, yells] (you suck greebo!)
Ria: And why is exercising good?
William: Because it'll burn your energy!

William readily jumps to the idea of exercise as a solution to fatness, suggesting running, going to the gym, or an exercise tape, to 'burn energy'. His comments here seem to invoke the cultural imagery of weight loss and fitness programs; including being yelled at and insulted, perhaps by a fitness coach ('you suck greebo!'). Again here, then, exercise is constructed as an unpleasant tool to achieve weight-loss.

Most of the children readily connected Ogden being too big, and/or too fat, with his troubles with the sports, and enjoyed the mock horror of the destruction he causes:

> Ria: Mm, so why do you think that happened?
> Aimee: Maybe cos he's a big- he's big? {and he's like a giant (to them)
> Lara: {and he's stomping really hard [demonstrates, stomping across the room]
>
> Jane: Yep, he can't do sports cos he's a giant
>
> Levi: He's too fat.
> Ria: Yeah? How can you tell?
> Levi: He's really really round [tracing the illustration]
> Ria: Yeah? So what does it mean to be too fat?
> Levi: He can {bounce on his tummy, and bounce around
>
> Hemi: Oh look! He smash
> Ria: What happened? C-RUNCH went the ceiling….
> Hemi: Because he too fat
> Ria: Yeah?
> Hemi: Yeah, he's too f- because he eat evryth- look, sad, sad, sad, sad, (they're sad)
> Ria: Oh, why are they sad?
> Hemi: Because he smashed the wall
>
> Ria: What's happening?
> Felipe: I think he's too big, cos he's too big-
> Ria: He's too big
> Felipe: He's too big to get- to fit in the house and he'll break everything in the house if he's too big
> Ria: Oh
> Felipe: If- if- if- if we- someone has to make us- (some way to make him shwink like the kids) and then he'll be small
> Ria: Someone needs to make him a swing?
> Felipe: No
> Ria: Oh- What did you say?
> Felipe: A shrink ray!
> Ria: (Oh) A shrink ray! So that he's shrunk down to be small

As demonstrated here, Children were fairly evenly divided on whether they described Ogden as 'too big' or 'too fat', and in this way the ogre seems to provide a good example of the overlap- and tension- between these notions. Noticeably though, either way he is constructed as unable, and "bad at everything" (Levi). Likewise, the people's advice in the story aims to change him to enable him to fit in, and become more 'normal', as Felipe poignantly reiterates with his suggested solution of a shrink ray. Interestingly, both the explicit text of the story, and the children's comments above, primarily locate this as a problem *within Ogden*. Yet there is clearly scope here for an interpretation that highlights the importance of context and

environment. He is too big *because the town has been designed only for the people*. However, only William really touches on this idea in his talk about the story:

> William: Yoga isn't good for ogres cos ogres have to go to ogre town and do ogre yoga
> Ria: Ogre yoga? What's different about ogre yoga?
> William: Yep, because ogre yoga is in ogre town and- he should not be living in the people town
> Ria: Mm! why not?
> William: Cos he might smash people's things
> Ria: Ahh... cos he's a bit big maybe?
> William: He's a big giant fat ogre! [putting on a deeper tough voice and expression, standing up and moving his arms and feet to imitate a big fierce monster]

Yet though William recognises the problem in the environment here, his solution is still that *Ogden* should leave, and go to ogre town, rather than that the town should (have) be(en) built to accommodate diversity. Indeed, while the people show token aspects of diversity in other ways (skin colour, hair, clothes) they are noticeably lacking in any diversity in relation to size (either height, width or shape), increasing the contrast with the big round ogre, and his status as different.

However, despite being constructed as the problem, Ogden is also clearly a sympathetic character, and children did seem to empathise with both the ogre and the people….

> Ria: What keeps happening? [as she turns the page]
> Liam: He keeps breaking stuff cos he's too big
> Hannah: Yeah
> Ria: Aha
> Hannah: Everything that he tries to do- it's no no no no [tapping the illustration of crossed out sports balls]- no to everything
> Ria: [chuckles]
> Liam: And they all ditch him, cos look [points to the illustration of Ogden and the people sitting at either end of the bench] there's a gap and he's by hisself
> Ria: Mm
> Liam: Cos they done evrything- he done everything, that was wrong
>
> Isabella: That means- those three are sitting on that end, and the ogres sitting on that end (lonely) because they don't like him because um [breath, and then more slowly] he ruined the whole school and now those people are sad- those three- um those two gir- those two boys and one girl is really sad so is the ogre

This illustration, showing Ogden at one end of a bench and the people at the other, seemed to be a powerful image of social rejection, and one the children easily related to. The children recognised Ogden's

sadness about being banned from playing the sports that he enjoyed, as well as the presentation of him as set apart from the people, and lonely. However, only William takes this further to really point out the unfairness of the people banning him from playing sports:

> William: That doesn't seem fair cos they're being mean to him [then to the camera] we should not be mean to our friends
> Ria: Mm
> William: Because if they be mean, they will get in trouble. And then- we will have to ring the police, and say hey the police, these two- these three children are saying no blah blah blah stuff and they're not letting me play what I want to play [talking to camera again]
> Ria: Mm? Cos how might he feel not getting to play any of those sports
> William: You might feel angry and you might gobble them up

Like Hannah and Liam, William talks briefly to the camera here to reinforce a powerful message which children receive from parents and teachers, the importance of being kind. He goes on to back this up with the suggestion that being mean will get you in trouble, not just from adults but from the even stronger authority of the police. Interestingly, he also suggests a different emotion for Ogden, anger rather than sadness, and invokes the ogre's avowedly ravenous nature to suggest he might solve this by just eating them!

Most of the children gave positive overall impressions of Ogden's story.

> Ria: What do you think of that?
> William: [making a face with raised eyebrows] Different. Different to the school library books
> Ria: Different? Yeah?
> William: It's different but it's funny
>
> William: That was (fun... it was like)… it was the craziest story

However, the diverse ways in which they interpret the ending encapsulate how they focused on different aspects within the story, using their broader understandings of the world to make sense of the ambiguous nature of the ending. For example, Lara and Aimee repeat the suggestion that Ogden should try eating just one pie, rather than twelve, and find jogging a good solution. Aimee makes sense of this as jogging doesn't

involve holding anything; here, she references a construction of ogres as big and strong, but clumsy with Ogden unable to control his strength.

Levi also focuses on the positive solution offered by jogging:

> Ria: Ogden has taken up jogging instead.
> Levi: [2] That's good
> [...]
> Ria: {Why do you think that is?
> Levi: Because_ (he found) he can jog
> Ria: He can jog?
> Levi: [nods]
> Ria: How do you think the people feel now?
> Levi: Really happy
> Ria: {Happy?
> Levi: {for him
> Ria: For him? cos he's found something he can do?
> Levi: Yep
>
> Ria: so what did you think of that story?
> Levi: {It was_ kinda actually nice?

Levi suggests the people are happy *for Ogden* because he has found something he can do after all (presumably without causing too much devastation), and seemed to find it a positive ending, though with some uncertainty. He was not alone in having some reservations, however, or in noticing that the ending leaves a lot unsaid or unresolved.

> Ria: And do you think- do you think that Ogden was healthy, in the end?
> Piper: Yep. Ah_- you can do this one now [passing Ria the next story]
> Ria: How can you tell?
> Piper: Because_ [turns *The Yoga Ogre* around to look at its cover] he____ uhoh [shrugs and smiles]
> Jane: {(??) light blue so I'm gonna do dark blue [choosing pencils]
> Piper: {I know how I can tell! [flipping through the pages, looking for something]
> Ria: Yeah? [pause as Piper keeps flipping]
> Piper: Cos he's tried lots of sports, and then-
> Ria: Mm?
> Piper: And- and he must have new pyjamas- and um he must have shrunken a little bit so his current pyjamas would fit?
> Ria: Mm?
> Piper: So he won't... be... uncomfortable any more [shuts the book and puts it down]

Piper here notes it was healthy for him to ‘try lots of sports’, but also refers back to the *specifics* of the initial ‘problem’: that Ogden’s ‘jammies’ didn’t fit anymore, an idea that the book itself doesn’t return to in either pictures or text. Yet Piper suggests this must have resolved, presumably since they are all shown as

happy in the end, and wonders whether he must have ‘shrunken a little bit’ (possibly lost some weight through the jogging and exercise?) or perhaps bought himself new pyjamas. William also found it generally positive in terms of health messages, noting Ogden “was nice and fit and healthy”.

In contrast Hannah and Liam, though they enjoyed the story, argued against its usefulness in talking about health, focusing on a construction of Ogden as fat:

> Ria: So did you think that one about the ogre had anything to do with health?
> Liam: (Nope)
> Ria: Did it have any good or bad health messages?
> Hannah: {mm- nah
> Liam: {nah
>
> [Later, when talking to the camera....]
>
> Liam: and guys! [standing in front of the camera again, with a nod for emphasis] Rule number two [holds up two fingers, then makes way for Hannah who holds up a page from *The Yoga Ogre*. Then Liam nudges her out of the way again] That guy’s fat! [pointing his thumb back at the book, then ducks out of the shot]
> Hannah: [giggles from behind the book] This guy’s fat
> Liam: [pops up again] so guys, don't listen to him

In opposition to William then, who takes Ogden’s ‘side’ in the story, Hannah and Liam end up dismissing Ogden’s point of view, because he’s fat. Likewise, Piper argues that this positions him in clear opposition to health:

> Ria: Do you think he's healthy?
> Jane: {yyyy-
> Piper: {No
> Jane: no
> Piper: Nooo
> Jane: No
> Piper: Booo! [shakes a downwards thumb]
> Ria: why not?
> Piper: Cos he's not healthy_! [loudly, laughing a little]
> Jane: He's not healfy_ [choosing a new pen]
> Ria: How can you tell?
> Jane: I don't know=
> Piper: Cos he's fat!
> Jane: [laughs] I don't know why I can tell
> Piper: Cos he's {fat!
> Jane: {(cos he's fat maybe) I don't know!
> Piper: Cos he's fat! [chuckles]

Children's final readings of this story then were wide-ranging. While *The Yoga Ogre* provided an engaging read for children, as well as raising a lot of interesting ideas in terms of not just healthy eating and exercise, or the meanings we ascribe to different bodies, but also issues of diversity and acceptance of difference, which aspects they focused on meant how children interpreted the story varied greatly. The words and images of the story seem to provide a framework within which children brought different ideas to bear, interpreting it within their wider understandings of the world. For some this meant focusing on a negative lens of fatness and (ill-)health, while for others there seemed to be more sympathy for Ogden as being different and making mistakes, highlighting the importance of not 'being mean'.

Willy the Wimp

Hemi: "He want to be a g'rilla aye?" ... "Because a- because he strong and bigger?"

Like the previous stories, *Willy the Wimp* (1984) also focuses on lifestyle behaviours (diet and exercise), body size and transformation. However, this story does not explicitly talk about health, fitness or fatness; rather it focuses on becoming big and strong. Willy follows the advice from an advertisement of how to stop being a 'wimp'. Children readily picked up this focus on strength:

Ria: [reading] First, some exercises.
Liam: Then he gets strong
Ria: Mm?
Hannah: Yeah, like (?) when we- when we exercise, (that guy nudu -does that)
Liam: Look, I do lots of exercise [flexing his bicep]
Hannah: I do too
Liam: He just like runs, eat bananas... hey! bana-
Ria: Then some jogging.
Liam: Bananas not exercising!
Ria: Willy had to go on a special diet

Again, children readily followed this story, and Willy's desire to be big, strong and tough; as well as exercises as a way to get there. As with the previous stories, children often suggested additional exercises or demonstrated their own strength and skill, for example showing me their muscles as Liam and Hannah do above. Likewise, Levi and Jack below demonstrate some more vigorous exercises that Willy could do to get strong:

Ria: Does that look like a good exercise?
Levi: [shakes head] no.
Ria: no?
Levi: looks like stretching
Ria: Yeah? {is stretching good?
Levi: {Yeah
Jack: {He n- he needs to do like this [getting up and jumping up and down] as well
Ria: Oh, like pushing himself up?
Jack: Yeah, like h- like this [goes out of the screen to demonstrate]
Ria: Ah- like, like push ups? What would those be good for? Why does he need to do those?
Levi: make his [holds his forearms up in front of him] big arms - strong

Here then the 'growing big and strong' discourse that was occasionally apparent in children's talk about the other stories seems to be at the forefront. With no reference to fatness, 'big'ness here is a positive thing.

Participants were fascinated by Willy's transformation through exercise, to become big and strong:

Liam: He's got no big strong musculules
Ria: Willy took up weight-lifting
Liam: [makes a grunting noise, like lifting something heavy]
Ria: and gradually over weeks and months, Willy got bigger and bigger and BIGGER and BIGGER
Hannah: Woah he's strong now
Liam: Wait- bigger, bigger, bigger, bigger!
[…]
Liam: {cos he's so strong exercising on lots of days, that's how he's gonna beat someone in a match

Children were less sure about Willy's 'diet', however; which brought up similar tensions to the previous stories, between *what* you eat and *how much* you eat:

Isabella: And eating bananas {but that's too much
Ria: [reading] {*Willy had to go on a special diet*… That's too much?
Isabella: He's eating bananas, but it's too much, but it's healthy?

Ria: What's his diet?
Levi: Bananas=
Jack: =Bananas
Ria: What do you think of that diet? Does that sound good?
Jack: Nah!
Ria: nah? why not?
Jack: Because! he's eating too much bananas! [loudly]
Ria: Too many bananas? there is a lot there isn't there?
Jack: Yeah, its cos he's eating too much bananas...
Ria: Mmm
Jack: Like he'll go like this [mimes stuffing his face] then he'll get [pushes out his tummy and rubs it] {so he'll get a fat tum

Both Isabella and Jack are worried about the quantity of bananas shown on Willy's plate in the illustration here, despite them being a healthy fruit. Interestingly, Jack once again relates thus to a risk of fatness, though fatness is not mentioned at all in the text or illustrations of this particular story.

Overall participants once again found this a generally positive story in terms of health. For example, Hannah and Liam pointed out the advert at the start displaying the muscled chimp, and that Willy was 'buying good things that he was supposed to". Likewise, Aimee explained:

> Ria: Mm, so what did you think of that story?
> Aimee: It was good, because... {Because- he was trying lots
> [...]
> Aimee: He was doing_ lots of different sports... and_ sports are good... {for people
> Ria: {Mm?
> Aimee: well, my fa- I'm just gonna have a look... [flicking through the pages]
> [...]
> Aimee: {My favourite sport- my favourite sport was the jogging

However, children also noticed and were confused by the ambiguous ending to the story, where Willy bangs into a pole and apologises, seemingly returning physically as well as mentally to his old self:

> Aimee: [reading] *"Oh I'm sorry", said Willy.* Now he's not big anymore [flipping back and forth between the pages]
> Ria: Hmm
> Aimee: He got thinner
> Ria: How did that happen?
> Aimee: I don't know
> Ria: Why do you think the story ended like that?
> Aimee: Maybe because he banged into a pole
>
> Ria: [reading] *BANG.*
> Hannah: Bumped into the thing
> Liam: But he's still not a hero
> Ria: "Oh I'm sorry", said Willy.
> Liam: {Whaaa?! [both exclaiming loudly]
> Hannah: {That's just a pole!!
> Ria: [laughs]
> Liam: He's saying sorry [muttering]
> Hannah: It was him who did it!
> Liam: But he sayed sorry to a pole

Cinderella's Bum

The final story, *Cinderella's Bum* (2004), was less clearly relevant to a focus on health and somewhat confusing to participants. While the title and cover page focusing on Cinderella caught the attention of some of the girls particularly, this was somewhat deceptive about the content of the book (in which Cinderella features only very briefly). The focus on 'bums and bottoms' did seem to have some of the desired effect in capturing the children's attention with a somewhat outrageous and forbidden topic, invoking a lot of giggles, but they didn't seem to be quite sure what to make of it, as with the participants below:

> Piper: [looks over at the pile of books] ooh! I love Cinderella! [pulling out *Cinderella's Bum*] Cinderella's *Bum*! [making a face as she reads the full title]
> Ria: [laughs]
> Jane: {Oh my god!
> Piper: {(what-!) [holds it up to Ria] Read this!
>
> Ria: That one? You want that one first?
> Aimee: The- it says, *Cinderella's Bum* [pointing at the title and smiling]
> Ria: {It does!
> Lara: {Eww!
> Ria: This story is called Cinderella's Bum and Other Bottoms
> Lara: [giggles] ew.... {Cinderella's *Bum*!

For some, the initial 'problem' in this story was a bit obscure or strange:

> Ria: My big sister's always worried about her bum.
> Lara: Ew!
> Aimee: Eww! [points at something, smiling]
> Ria: Why do you think that is? {What do you think that means?
> Aimee: {Because_ hm. I don't know why she doesn't like it [chuckles]
>
> Ria: My big sister's always worried about her bum.
> Isabella: [laughs]
> Ria: Do you know anybody like that?
> Ada: No
> Isabella: No [chuckling]
> Ria: What do you think that means?
> Ada: we don't know
> Ria: Hmm..
> Isabella: So-
> Ada: being rudy maybe?
> Isabella: Yeah it means that they're being rude to their o- to their sister

In these responses children primarily seem to find the whole concept of the big sister worrying about her bum strange. Bums are just something you have, that you 'just live with', and that is 'useless'. While the focus on healthy living, fatness and thinness, muscles and strength, from previous stories seem to draw on familiar discourses to the children, the focus in this story on particular body parts like bums does not. That is, for these children bums seem to be constructed as taboo, but not as something subject to surveillance.

The idea explored in the story that all body parts come in different shapes and sizes met with mixed reactions from participants. For example, Levi simply commented 'yep that's true', while Chloe seemed to find it strange since it was too obvious and broad an idea:

> Ria: [reading] So I told her: mouths are all shapes and sizes. Noses are all shapes and sizes, {and bums are all shapes and sizes too.
> Chloe: {Everyhing- and everythingk is
> Ria: Mm
> Chloe: Like- [.] even a [2] even a table is
> Ria: Yeah, tables can be different shapes and sizes.
> Chloe: Everything

While these children agreed with the general idea, they didn't seem to engage with the critical implications for how we talk about particular body shapes and sizes. However, many did seem to be fascinated by the exaggerated diversity of the body parts in the illustrations, and by all the bottoms on display given their usual taboo nature:

> Ria: [chuckles] What do you think of.. that? About things being different shapes and sizes?
> Hannah: Yep
> Ria: Yeah?
> Hannah: Show the book, show the book!
> […]
> Liam: See, this is a big moustache, big lips, big nose... big lips, big teeth, big lips...
> Hannah: [giggles]
>
> Ria: What do you guys think of that?
> Lara: Look at ()… his bum...
> Aimee: That ones the biggest!
> Lara: Ha! that's a fat one [laughs]
> Aimee: () [laughing]
> Lara: Look at that one!
> Aimee: They're funny
> Lara: Bummy, bummy, bummy, bummy
> Aimee: That one has stripes on it!
> […]

Ria: Is that true?
Lara: It's funny because they're showing all of their bums!
Ria: [chuckles]
Lara: Showing bums
Aimee: Look at that long nose! It's so long!
Ria: Yeah
Lara: What the heck, is that a nose?
Ria: {It's a pretty big nose
Aimee: {It looks like an alligators mouth except it's a nose
Lara: {is that a nose? is that actually a nose?
Ria: {Mm. and what about the mouths? are they-
Aimee: That one's so tiny!

Ria: What else is different shapes and sizes?
Isabella: [holds up her hand eagerly]
Ada: Teeth
Ria: Teeth? yeah?
Isabella: And um_ your hands can get different sizes but not your body?
Ria: Mm?
Ada: But you have to grow, to get taller and taller {for your birthdays
Ria: {you get bigger and bigger, yeah
Isabella: And, if you grow bigger and your um body and your legs are still small, that means it's different
Ria: Mm, yeah?
Ada: But you can not swim in your swimsuit then
Ria: Mm?
Ada: {Look at her! I can see her bottom!
Ria: {Yeah, why not do you think? yeah, lots of bottoms in that picture...
Isabella: [laughs] I see this bottom... this looks like a bottom
Ria: Yeah
Ada: That is a bottom
Ria: I think they're all bottoms

Here the children engage with the variety of body parts on display, pointing out different parts of the illustrations with giggles. Again, however, this didn't seem to follow through to engagement with the broader implications. Rather the exaggerated and isolated body parts seem to encourage surveillance and highlight their absurdity, rather than encouraging acceptance of diversity.

Lots of the examples of 'usefulness' were also deemed confusing, or occasionally offensive. For example, Isabella defends Santa from the suggestion that he has a 'big bum':

Ria: So I said... Big bums can be useful. Santa has a big bum, especially for crash landings
Isabella: Santa doesn't! [screwing up her face in outrage]
Ria: [laughs] do you think... why might it be helpful, if he's crashing?
Isabella: That means his bum will get hurt
Ria: Yeah?
Ada: He fell in!
Isabella: [seriously] and then he had to go to the hospital and then he couldn't um bring presents anymore

Making sense of having a 'big bum' in terms of fatness, seems to mean it is considered an insult, that Isabella feels she must defend Santa against. The idea that having a big bum might be a positive and helpful thing in this instance doesn't seem to gain traction for the children.

Finally, children seemed to take the 'happy' ending at face value, when the big sister's problem is 'solved' when she realises she was trying to get into the wrong swimsuit all along:

> [both look up and peer at the picture]
> Ria: what happened at the end there?
> Ada: She found hers
> Ria: She found her one
> Isabella: Because those are hers cos she- she fought that was hers but it's not
> Ria: Mm
> Isabella: But those are hers and those are big for her
> Ria: Mm. So what did you think of that story?
> Ada: It's good and I'm going to rub out this
> Ria: It was good? Do you think it had any messages about health?
> Isabella: No
> Ada: Uh-uh [both shaking heads]
>
> Ria: What happened there?
> Levi: She's happy because- she doesn't actually- needs to worry about her bottom?

Here the ending seems to reinforce the initial concern. The big sister doesn't have to worry about her bottom after all, *because it hasn't grown*. That is, she isn't fat after all, and so can go swimming and be happy.

Despite some critical potential, this story seemed to be unsuccessful at portraying this for the participants in the current study. Children's overall impression of the story was often that it was a bit too weird. For example, Lara commented **"**This is gross, it's all about bums and knickers"; while Jane, Piper and Lara said it was "just really weird". It's possible that this story would be more suited to a slightly older audience, or a different demographic; however, the participants in the current study didn't seem to find it very relatable, or to engage much with the attempted messages about body diversity.

Bringing it together: Constructing bodies & healthy living

While there was diversity in how children read and talked about the different stories, there were some key features of their talk that aligned with my own analysis of the books. Below I elucidate three different, but interrelated, discourses which children used at different times to construct bodies and healthy living. The first is a broad discourse of 'healthy living' that constructs health as an individual responsibility, involving particular eating and exercise behaviours. Following this I discuss two alternative discourses of the body, that each align with 'healthy living' discourse, but with contrasting effects for how they construct healthy bodies, eating and exercise. Finally I outline some key features of these discourses and the ways they interact in children's talk, before exploring how some of the complexities and ambiguities inherent in the stories were interpreted by children in the discussion groups; as well as notions of pleasure and kindness that were sometimes apparent in children's discussions, and how these might relate to alternative discourses.

A 'Healthy Living' Discourse

In children's talk about the picture books, it is clear that they have engaged with the 'Healthy Living' discourse present in the texts. As I argued in relation to the books, this discourse constructs healthy living in line with healthism, placing a responsibility on individuals to take care of their own health, by eating a healthy diet, getting exercise and being active. In children's talk this was apparent in their comments about "being healthy" involving eating the right kinds of foods (fruits and vegetables particularly), not eating the wrong kinds of foods (cake, biscuits, lollies, pies), and also eating the correct *amount* of food (especially not eating 'too much'). Children tended to readily agree that the 'diet' the Large Family go on in *A Piece of Cake* (1989) was a healthy one, though not always particularly appetising, and that Ogden's pictured diet of pies was an unhealthy one and definitely 'too much'. At times these different parts of healthy eating created tensions for children, for example in trying to make sense of Willy's diet of a large pile of bananas (a healthy

fruit but still too much), or in advising the best course of action for Ogden (Liam: 'Just eat some vegetables' vs Hannah: 'that would make him a little bit fat'), depending whether they focused on the type or amount of food.

A key aspect of 'good' healthy food in children's talk was a lack of sugar, as Chloe points out below:

> Ria: So, how do you guys know what's healthy?
> Chloe: um-
> Tayla: I know what's {healthy_ [slapping both hands on the table]
> Chloe: Because it helps us?
> Ria: Mm?
> Tayla: Hey, like you drinking water [indicating Ria's drink bottle]- that's healthy and that-
> Chloe: Because- it doesn't- [gasps, standing up, eyes wide] because it doesn't have <u>sugar</u> in it!
> Nicole: {Mm [nods]
> Tayla: {yes
> Ria: {Mm?
> Chloe: and sugar's_ ... <u>bad</u> for you!

When asked about whether you could tell if someone was healthy, Tayla argues that you could if they were eating a salad, going on to suggest that vegetables can cancel out a little bit of sugar:

> Tayla: {Guess what- salad's are sooo_ good for you [placing a hand on the desk for emphasis, Ria nods] when you mix ah mayo in it [demonstrates mixing as if she's holding a spoon] it's so good for you, cause_ [claps] the mayo [taps the desk with both hands] has_ a _little [holds up one hand in front of her face making a small hole with her fingers] bit of um sugar, and_ ... [adjusting her paper on the desk] it's more vegables? [gesturing with open palms facing towards her body, then rotating her hands around each other] then, the vegables can make the {mayo into no sugar? [slides one palm across the other] ... take the um sugar away? [gestures outwards with one hand] ...like that and then you can eat... [gestures towards her mouth]

While children were less likely to spontaneously talk about exercise in relation to health, often just continuing to list fruits and vegetables, or other foods; most readily took up this aspect of 'Healthy Living' discourse when presented in the books, approving of the characters' new exercise regimes. Although at times this was also a point of tension or negotiation for children, with Isabella for example finding this part confusing as she seemed to construct healthy living solely in relation to eating habits; while Ada argued instead that "Doing sports *is* sometimes healthy…". Others engaged with this more enthusiastically (William: "He should actually exercise!"; Hannah: "Exercise! Good, good, good!"). Often children would get up to demonstrate their own skills, other exercises the characters could do, or how to do them better.

Chloe started by drawing good healthy fruits and vegetables; then added another page of exercise labelled 'running' (see Figure 17). Later she also drew a TV, noting 'this a television. And they're not-allowed-to-just sit down (and do the) television. Cos it's not healthy'.

Figure 17. Chloe's page divided into 'healthy' and 'not healthy'; her drawing labelled 'running'; and her drawing of a television.

The healthist slant of 'Healthy Living' discourse, where doing health behaviours correctly is given a *moral* weight, was also apparent in children's talk. That is, in talking about foods as 'good' or 'bad', using terms such as 'junk food', and healthy living behaviours as what you 'should' do. For example, group one (Tayla, Nicole & Chloe) decided to divide their drawing page in half into healthy and unhealthy, reinforcing a clear dichotomy between these ideas. Further, this was particularly apparent throughout Hannah and Liam's interview, where they enthusiastically took up the role of 'teachers', talking directly to the camera to outline a number of health 'rules', Liam for example suggesting being healthy involved: "Eating *good* food that you *have to*- that you're *supposed to* eat"[emphasis added].

Notably in their health 'rules' Hannah and Liam highlight eating 'good food', eating vegetables generally (and broccoli specifically), and not eating lollies, licorice, ice blocks and ice cream... or at least not too much 'before you go to bed'. While they mostly focus on diet, they do also mention exercise as 'good' and healthy. They also use words such as 'should' 'supposed to' and even 'have to'; while their focus on simple 'rules' and imperative instructions likewise reproduce this construction of a simple recipe to follow as well

as a moral weight to doing health correctly. They also used the books to demonstrate their ideas, pointing out different characters doing health correctly- or not.

> [Hannah is holding up the page of *Willy the Wimp* with the advert (‘*Don't be a Wimp*!’)]
> Liam: stop... Guys!
> Hannah: you have to be healthy like this good man [pointing to the muscly chimp shown in the advert]
> Liam: And this guy [points to Willy on the page opposite] he's buying some things that he is supposed to.
>
> [in relation to *The Yoga Ogre*:]
> Liam: That guy’s fat! [pointing his thumb back at the book, then ducks out of the shot]
> Hannah: [giggles from behind the book] This guy’s fat
> Liam: [pops up again] so guys, don't listen to him

In contrast to the ‘good man’ shown in the advert in *Willy the Wimp*, Hannah and Liam’s dismissal of Ogden (*The Yoga Ogre, 2012*) as fat, and therefore unworthy of being listened to (about health) highlights the way healthy living discourse was often intertwined with an anti-fat discourse, as I discuss below. Liam’s comment, connecting consumerist culture to healthy living, ‘buying some things that he is supposed to’, is also insightful here, given the big business that is selling ‘healthy lifestyles’.

Likewise Liam at other points references shopping in relation to making healthy choices:

> Liam: You should get- so if you're going shopping you should ask your mum, (about) if you can get some vegetables for -um- like=
> Hannah: =Dinner
>
> Liam: Last night I went- I went to the shop and I they just- and I got a lolly- and then um I just- and then- I had $1 more dollar and I wanted to get something healthy for that?
> Ria: Mm?
> Liam: So um- they now sell carrots that are sugar free lollies? they're not- they don't have any sugar? and they're healthy?
> Hannah: Yeah, sugar free lollies. My mum has those

Liam’s hesitation, and construction of his motives here is notable; aware of how he might be judged for his choice to buy lollies from the shop within the constraints of a healthy living discourse, he goes on to construct his decision about what to spend his remaining money on in relation to making healthy choices. His solution is a poignant one. That is, by focusing on *sugar* specifically as the problem, Liam suggests that ‘sugar free’ lollies, shaped like carrots, could be a ‘healthy’ choice for him to make. Here he shows a savvy negotiation of healthy living discourse, to still position himself in a positive light.

Like Liam's comment here, children often related their understandings of 'healthy living' to themselves, positioning themselves as good moral citizens doing health correctly. For example,

> Jane: I eat fruit
> Piper: I have fruit and vegetables in my lunchbox
>
> Liam: {my mum puts two apples in my lunch, cos- um
> Hannah: I've got oranges in my- and I ate all my oranges
> Liam: My mum packs two um orange- um apples- for eating for my lunch, cos I like apples
> Ria: Yum
> Hannah: and my mum- and my dad gives me heaps o oranges for lunch *and*_ morning tea
>
> Aimee: I exercise a lot because I go to a gym for my gymnastics
>
> Liam: Look, I do lots of exercise [flexing his bicep]
> Hannah: I do too
>
> Isabella: Bananas are healthy like I have orange- orange for um- for brain food and- I have yoghurt for brain food? but it's not even healthy
> Ria: Mm?
> Isabella: Its chocolate- yoghurt

Here the children talk about their own exercising, and the healthy fruit and vegetables that they eat, to show not just their health *knowledge*, but also *practice* of healthy living. The number of comments about their *lunch boxes* specifically, and reference to 'brain food' (a common term at school for morning tea), rather than the foods they eat at other times, perhaps also demonstrate children's awareness of school lunch boxes as a focal point of adult interest in children's health and a point of surveillance. Notably, Liam also demonstrates by showing me the evidence of his muscles, a point I return to below in more depth with the healthy *body* discourses and a focus on the aesthetics of health. However, Isabella's comment above is also interesting here, in pointing out the grey areas of a healthy lunchbox. That is, while 'yoghurt' is considered a healthy option, she is aware that her particular 'chocolate yoghurt' is more ambiguous.

Further, children's uptake of 'healthy living' discourse was not without any resistance. For example Tayla noted:

> Ria: So, how do you learn about what's healthy?
> Chloe: Becau-
> Tayla: [loudly] oh, cos our teacher tells us
> Ria: your teacher tells you {about it?
> Chloe: {no, because our mum tells us, {sometimes
> Nicole: {(yeah)

Ria: yeah?
Tayla: Guess what! My mum always tells me to eat um vegables but I don't really.

In this comment, Tayla and Chloe talk about health knowledge as coming from the authority figures of parents (specifically mum) and teachers. This allows Tayla to position it as something she may or may not listen to. In contrast to the imperatives with which children often talked about healthy living, this framing opens it up to resistance and childhood rebellion. While she knows she *should* eat her vegetables, she also resists this instruction, noting 'I don't really'. Likewise, some resistance was also apparent in children's talk in relation to food and pleasure, as I discuss later.

'Or you'll get fat' Discourse

In my analysis of the books, I also highlighted a particular discourse about fatness which aligns closely with the healthy living discourse outlined above. Here, fatness is constructed as negative, caused by eating too much and being inactive, aligned with ill-health, and with implications for how fat people are viewed. In the stories, fat bodies are generally taken-for-granted as a 'problem' to be solved, through correctly following the tenets of healthy living discourse. In children's talk this construction of fatness was also clearly present, with fatness explicitly talked about as the negative consequence of failing to do 'healthy living' correctly; that is, particularly, of eating 'too much' of the wrong foods and failing to exercise. For example, Hannah summed up *A Piece of Cake* (1989), commenting: "that's why don't eat that much cake or you'll get fat bye!". Likewise, the children below also position fatness as a negative consequence:

Aimee: {A diet means... you- you don't eat.. um... you don't eat... treats... and_ you don't eat... [opens her mouth to continue]
Lara: =bad food for you. {Like lollies
Aimee: {you don't eat like lollies_ or any_ of the bad stuff...
Lara: =No chocolate=
Aimee: that makes people fat {like chocolate

Lara: You need to exercise or you'll get really fat
Ria: Yeah?
Lara: [laughs] {yeah, like um..
Ria: {and what would that mean?
Aimee: Well, if you eat lots of lollies you might get really fat

Ria: so what does being fat mean?
Chloe and Nicole: Um_

...
Chloe: and_ if you [gasps and sits forward] oh, if you don't eat healthy food?

Here eating sweet unhealthy foods like lollies and chocolate is constructed as creating a risk of fatness, while eating vegetables and doing exercise are constructed as protective against fatness. Fatness is used like a threat, a negative consequence to be avoided. Likewise, Liam discusses *The Yoga Ogre (2012)*:

Liam: He has to eat vegetables or- then he will - um- not be fat
Hannah: Look-look-look- there's his two ears [giggles] look at his ears!
Ria: [chuckles] awesome. So what does being fat mean?
Liam: Um, that means he's getting big [gestures out from his tummy]
Hannah: Because he's eating too much- [pointing to the piles of pies in the illustration] he's eating too much stuff
Ria: {Ah

Above Liam and Hannah argue that Ogden is too fat, caused by eating too much (pies) and suggests a simple solution: he needs to eat more vegetables. Likewise, in the same group, Hannah decided to draw a picture of an ogre eating a banana (see Figure 18). In this way, children 'read' Ogden's fat body, particularly the size of his tummy, as problematic, with implications for how he is positioned. This is reinforced in the story, as he continues to cause widespread destruction, 'because he's too fat':

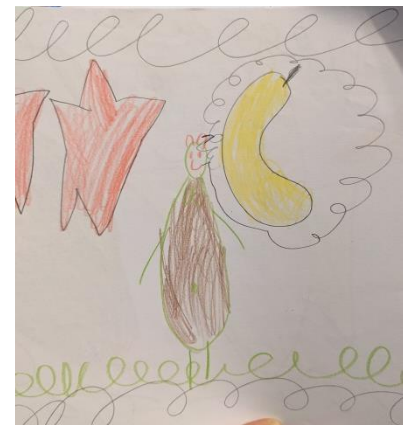

Figure 18. Hannah's drawing of an ogre eating a banana.

Hemi: Oh look! He smash
Ria: What happened? C-RUNCH went the ceiling….
Hemi: Because he too fat
Ria: Yeah?
Hemi: Yeah, he's too f- because he eat evryth- look, sad, sad, sad, sad, (they're sad)
Ria: Oh, why are they sad?
Hemi: Because he smashed the wall

Ogden is positioned as to blame here, for failing to fit in or correct his 'too fat' body, smashing things, and making everyone sad. Likewise, in talking about the Large family in *A Piece of Cake,* children seem to frame the story within an 'unhealthy fat' discourse; understanding the elephants' fatness as the 'problem' of the story, and something to be solved through diet and exercise changes.

Chloe: =they- they didn't want- they wanted to- um- eat healthy food

Ria: Mm?
Nicole: No, they- [holds up a finger] and they {can't eat really big food
Chloe: cos they were getting [gasps] because they were getting fat?
Ria: they can't eat big food?
Chloe: {because they were getting fat? But they were-
Nicole: {cos they'll get [draws a circle in the air with her hands] they'll get fatter

Ria: So what does being fat mean?
Liam: Um, that means you get big [patting his tummy, then lifting the shirt outwards] big -like this
Hannah: That's why you're not allowed to eat a cake
Ria: Not allowed to eat a cake?
Liam: And don't eat too much food

Again here the children relate fatness to the size of one's tummy, and to eating too much (especially of the wrong foods). They read the elephants' bodies, and the images of food, alongside the text of the story, to suggest that the elephants need to change what they eat 'because they were getting fat', and so argue that they '*can't* eat big food' and '*aren't allowed* to eat cake' [emphasis added]. Again in this discourse then, we see the moral weight of healthy living discourse, with particular weight for those whose fat bodies proclaim them to have failed to 'look after themselves' correctly. Children also understood this was connected to weight, and the illustrations of the elephants standing on bathroom scales:

Aimee: It looks like- they're weighing theirself
[…]
Ria: Mm? and why do you think they're doing that?
Aimee: To see how_ how fat they're getting? or how thin they're getting

Isabella: …and she's standing on the thing what she knows what size she is? but she's only a little bit um lower
Ria: Mm? ...so... what do you think she's measuring? and why is she measuring that?
Isabella: Because she wants- she- she wants to see how um large she's getting
Ria: Mm? Why is that?
Ada: Mm, we don't know
Isabella: So - she can be happy? If-
Ada: I'm gonna see which number she is [getting up and leaning really close to peer at the picture]

Within this discourse it is taken for granted that you can 'read' a fat body as evidence of failing to do health correctly, and that this can be measured by a number on a scale. Poignantly, Isabella relates this to Mrs Large's very ability to be happy. Likewise, Jane and Piper explicitly position health, fitness and fatness in opposition:

Piper: Cos he's not healthy_! [loudly, laughing a little]
Jane: He's not healfy_ …
Ria: How can you tell?
Jane: I don't know=

Piper: =Cos he's fat!

Jane: {cos you- cos you has to get fit, cos- if you get exercise, and- and you eat (?)
Piper: {why do you have to get *fat*?
Jane: {a lot of fruit and veggies, [breath] you- you- you- that means you can do anything you want, when you're fit
Ria: Mm?
Piper: You're fit not fat

Again here, we see eating fruits and vegetables, and getting exercise, constructed as a cure-all solution. That is, they will not only make you healthy and fit, which is positioned in opposition to fatness, but further 'that means you can do anything you want, when you're fit'. In contrast, fatness here is a negative consequence to be feared and avoided, the antithesis of being fit and healthy. Further, the implication is that when you are fat, you *can't* be happy or 'do anything you want'.

Here, Ogden fits readily into this discourse; too big and fat to fit in, or to succeed at any of the activities he tries. While a sympathetic character, it is also taken for granted that he is 'unable' because of his size.

Levi: Look what he did!
Jack: The basketball hoop broke!
Ria: Oh no! why do you think that happened?
Levi: Because he's too fat
Ria: Because he's too fat?
Jack: He bounced off the- chhhss!
Levi: He tried to make hisself skinnier
Ria: Mm? Why do you think he'd want to do that?
Levi: Cos he's too fat

'Cos he's too fat' here seems to require no further explanation; it clearly follows that he would be unable, cause destruction, and would want to try to become skinnier. Indeed the negative implications of being fat were broad. In their talk about the characters in the stories, children also highlighted a variety of social sanctions connected to being fat. For example:

Ria: [reading] *"As I was saying, I'm fat".* Have you ever heard anybody say that?
Ada: No
Isabella: [sits back holding her tummy and giggling]
Ada: But being- talking to people who are fat, like that, um- talking to people who are fat and saying they are fat is <u>not nice</u>! [confidently, wagging her finger to emphasise the last two words]
Ria: Mm {so why is that?
Isabella: {like then people get sad and then get (left alone)
Ada: {they'll get sad
Ria: Mm so what-
Isabella: {people won't like them anymore
Ada: {everyone will laugh at them

> Ria: Mm? so why is that?
> Isabella: Because then everyone won't like her anymore
> Ria: Oh. Why not?
> Isabella: Because_ people are being mean to her and then... that means that they are left alone and no-one wants to play with her because she has a fat tummy [earnestly]

Children already understood fatness as socially isolating, with severe consequences, and something to be avoided. As Isabella explains, being fat (specifically having a fat tummy) means people won't like them, won't play with them, will laugh at them, and they will be sad.

Fatness was simultaneously constructed as negative, and as a source of humour, something to be both derided and laughed at. As in the stories, where fat characters were often a focus of humour, talking about fat directly often seemed to invoke giggles for the children. A few of the skinnier children also laughingly made the 'joke' that they were fat, exaggerating their tummies for effect, as with Lara below:

> Lara: [stands up and pushes out her tummy] I'm fat! [laughs and sits down]

When asked whether they had heard people say they were fat, and why they might do so a few made comments such as: James: "cos them is too fat" [quietly, looking down], and Levi: "Um, cos they are?" [with a slight smile]. Their affect here seems to be one of either embarrassment or cheeky humour, fat seen either as awkward and unspeakable, or laughable. Interestingly, these comments seem to position being fat, or not, as a clear distinction and unambiguous. However, at other times this line was less clear cut in children's talk, especially when talking about real people they know. Some brought up the idea of people saying they were fat, even when they weren't; as well as fat as an insult:

> Ria: What do you guys think of that? [chuckle] Have you ever heard someone say that?
> Lara: {nope [still sharpening her pencil]
> Aimee: {my mum says she's fat but I don't think she's fat [shaking her head]
> Ria: Mm
> Lara: my sister says she's fat but I don't [drops her pencil and picks it up again] she's not fat but she thinks she's like, <u>so</u> fat
> Ria: {Hmm... so why do you think that happens?
> Aimee: {My brother is sometimes- (I don't know)- And my brother is sometimes mean because he calls my dad fat, and he's not
> […]
> Ria: When are you fat and when are you not fat and how do you tell? whether you're fat?
> Aimee: Yeah... well <u>he's</u> fat [points to the elephant in the illustration]

In the discussion above, Aimee and Lara seem to work to protect their loved ones from the negative positioning of being labelled 'fat'. While they have heard their (female) loved ones call themselves fat, they're not quite sure why, though are clear about the negative connotations involved. While the fatness of their family members is ambiguous, however, the illustrations of the elephants here provide an easier target, Aimee much more confident in declaring them as being fat. Further they note the use of fatness (e.g. to Aimee's dad) as an insult, in order to be 'mean'.

Following on from this construction of fatness then, children seemed to understand calling someone fat as a big deal, and very rude. William takes this even further with the idea of 'fat' as a forbidden word:

> Ria: have you heard anybody say anything like that?
> William: Ah_ (well Santa's fat)
> Ria: Yeah?
> William: He's a fat ass! {ooh, I said the f word [laughing and covering his mouth]

While many children made comments that reinforced the 'or you'll get fat' discourse, many also pointed out the rudeness of *calling* someone fat, as with Ada and Isabella above. Indeed*,* while clearly familiar, *A Piece of Cake* (1989)'s explicit discussion of fatness often seemed to make children slightly uncomfortable, evoking nervous giggles and some outright disapproval, again centred around the importance of being kind. Likewise in summing up their thoughts on the story, Aimee and Lara approve of Mrs Large's goals, but with concerns about being rude:

> Ria: The end. So what did you think of that story?
> Aimee: It was good.
> Ria: Yeah?
> Lara: Awesome! [in a sing song]
> Ria: Did it have good... messages about health?
> Lara & Aimee: yep
> Ria: What were they do you think? or what-
> Aimee: Well...
> Ria: was good or bad in the story?
> Aimee: The good thing... that they were trying to get... um they were trying to get fit so they could be skinnier
> Ria: Mm?
> Aimee: And the bad thing is they are just saying each other are fat and that's the bad thing cos that's not really nice

Here Aimee constructs 'trying to get fit' and 'trying to get skinnier' as intertwined and positive goals; it is only *calling* people fat that was the problem.

'Growing big and strong' Discourse

Children also talked about body size/shape in another distinctive way, drawing on what I have labelled a 'growing big and strong' discourse. Within this discourse, eating healthy food and doing exercise help you to grow big, strong and healthy.

> Ria: [laughs] what about... being healthy
> Riley: Yeah being healthy you'd be strong [pumps his arm muscles]
> Ria: Strong, mm?
> Riley: and you eat healthy food you get super strong
> Ria: You eat healthy food you get super strong? yep?
> Riley: and you eat little bit, you get little bit of muscle
> Ria: {You only get a little bit of muscle if you eat a little bit of food?
> Riley: Yeah
> Felipe: {(??) [holds up his pumped arm and feels his muscle]
> Ria: Ah_
> Riley: You eat a lot you get {super strong! [pumps both arms and puffs out chest]
> Ria: {Very strong. Ah_
> [pause]
> Felipe: If you eat healthy food you will grow big like Hulk!
> Ria: Big like Hulk- hulk smash [gestures]
> Felipe: [mimics Hulk smash gesture]
> Ria: Is that good?
> Felipe: Yeah, if you eat chicken and meat you'll grow bigger like Hulk smash to get all green and healthy
> Ria: Yeah? All gree_n and healthy!
> Felipe: Green like Hulk! [smiling]

Here, physical size is seen as positive, associated with being healthy and having strong muscles. Interestingly Felipe here references chicken and meat, rather than vegetables, in terms of healthy food; perhaps invoking a more macho masculine version of healthy living to become big and strong like Hulk. He also provides an interesting twist on the usual type of 'healthy greens' (vegetables), instead suggesting *becoming* 'green and healthy – like Hulk'.

Likewise, Corey decided to draw someone 'strong':

> Ria: How about you guys draw me a picture about_ healthiness? or_ a picture of someone who's healthy? What could you draw for that? Any ideas?
> Corey: This time, I'm gonna draw something- somebody so_ strong

Children of both genders eagerly showed me their big strong muscles at various times in the discussions, for example striking poses to show off the size of their triceps and biceps, as with Tayla below.

Ria: So why, why is stretching healthy?
Tayla: and- [turns to Ria and pauses, taking a breath] ...cause, um, it helps your body get stronger [lifts up her arms pumping her fists to make her triceps bulge]

Tayla: Help you see in the dark [gestures with finger out from her eye] and_ [pumps one fist again] um, when you eat carrots your muscles get stronger [touches her tricep muscle with her other hand] …and water helps you cos_ it_ helps_ your_ body... to keep… [does a little wiggle]
Ria: It helps your body… to...? [does an exaggerated wiggle, then opens out her hands questioningly]
Tayla: [jumps upright with both fists pumped again] stronger [growling, her face screwed up]

Again there seems to be an aesthetic component to this discourse, with children showing off the size of their muscles. There is the implication here that you can read big muscles as a sign of strength, fitness and health. However there is also, at least potentially, a functional element. Following the tenets of healthy living here (stretching, eating carrots, drinking water) make your body strong and *able*.

This discourse seems to echo parental messages that encourage children to eat up their dinner so they can grow big and strong; as well as training montages such as in *Willy the Wimp*, where a character does exercises and follows a particular diet to build up their muscles and become a 'hero'.

Aimee: [reading] and gra- dually over weeks and months, Willy got bigger and bigger - that's him- and BIGGER and BIGGER- that's him now!
Ria: Mm
Aimee: He could only do that- then he got that [pointing to the illustration where Willy is lifting the weight higher and higher]
Ria: So how did that happen?
Aimee: Because he was doing so much weight-lifting and so much sports
Ria: Mm

Ria: [reading] Willy looked in the mirror, he liked what he saw.
Liam: Woah!
Hannah: he looks very strong
Liam: in his undiewears

Ria: So is that how it really works?
James: Yeah
Ria: You get big and strong by…
James: Do_ing effort

While this discourse was most obvious in *Willy the Wimp*, children also referenced it at times in relation to the other stories. For example, Isabella approved of the jogging in *A Piece of Cake* (1989), noting:

Ria: How does that sound?
Isabella: Good. It- they-
[…]
Isabella: So- so they can get- more energy?

Ria: Yeah?
Isabella: And they can get more stronger
Ria: Mm?
Isabella: And they can get more... bigger

Notably, while again this body discourse references both parts of 'healthy living' discourse (eating well and exercising), here there is a particular focus on the exercise component. In this construction, sports and exercising, 'doing effort' lead to being big, strong and healthy.

Interacting discourses

Bigness as a point of tension

Interestingly then, these two bodily discourses, while both aligning with healthy living discourse, position large bodies in sometimes conflicting ways. This tension was apparent in children's talk at different times.

For example, Ogden in *The Yoga Ogre* (2012) provided an interesting overlap of the two body discourses, as he was constructed by children as 'too big', too strong, *and* 'too fat'. Here, his size and strength were generally constructed negatively as causing him to 'break everything'. Although it seems like he *could* be positively constructed by a 'growing big and strong' discourse, this seems to be overruled by his positioning as fat.

However, Tayla also explored the tension between these two discourses in talking about her dad:

Tayla: {um, guess what? My daddy is muscly [putting on a baby voice] but sometimes he gets [stands up on her chair] a bellyyy__ [pats her belly and starts jiggling her whole body]
Chloe: [laughs] sometimes {there's belly
Tayla: {my daddy gets belly__ [wiggles her belly again]

Here Tayla seems to be trying to make sense of these two alternative discourses as not necessarily in opposition, as evidenced by her Dad as *both* big and strong ('muscly'), but also potentially able to be positioned as fat (sometimes having a 'belly'). Here she seems to draw on the humour of fatness to soften the positioning of her dad as fat; at the same time offering a critique of the idea that fatness and strength

are necessarily mutually exclusive. Likewise, she is one of the only participants who agreed you *could* be *both* fit and fat; and at another point argues…

> Tayla: {no matter how if you're fat or you're big
> [...]
> Tayla: How you're fat [2] that will be so great. Cos you'll get more [holds her arms up to each side of her head, fists pumped] musclier and things… [trails off]
> Chloe: {Because- na na- [sighs]
> Tayla: [louder again] {and you'll get more healthily and you don't have to get um...

Though Tayla didn't finish her thought here, again she seems to be working through an idea of fatness, strength and health being potentially harmonious; perhaps attempting to use the positive connotations of 'bigness' in a 'growing big and strong' discourse to counter the negative connotations of fatness. Tayla was also the only participant to explicitly identify herself (and me) as fat, not as a joke but in a positive way, noting 'we're the fat girls [smiling] …cos we're_ [lifts her shirt again and pats her tummy] tummy!'. Here then she seems to be defending herself against the negative constructions of fatness, by claiming a more nuanced and positive identity in relation to her body, as well as common ground with me. Chloe then points out that: 'everyone has_ big tummies' [lifting her shirt and patting her tummy too].

While children predominantly talked about fat in negative ways, as I discussed above, and used one discourse or the other, Tayla occasionally negotiated a more complex understanding of large fat bodies, suggesting they could be muscley and strong, and even fit, *as well as* fat. Likewise, Lara and Aimee negotiated this idea to some degree, disagreeing about whether fatness and health were mutually exclusive:

> Ria: So can you be fat and healthy?
> Lara: Nope!
> Ria: No?
> Lara: No. No you can't [shaking head]
> [they look at Aimee, who smiles and nods]
> Aimee: Yeah, you can
> Ria: You can?
> Lara: You have to exercise heaps then!
> Ria: Yeah?
> Aimee: I exercise a lot because I go to a gym for my gymnastics
> Ria: Aha

> Aimee: After my dinner today I'll get to go to my gymnastics

Here then, a focus on doing *enough exercise* particularly, allows a softening of Lara's stance towards fatness.

Gendered constructions

Another point of contradiction in children's talk involved the influence of gender on these discourses of healthy bodies and healthy living. As discussed in the introduction, healthy body discourses tend to position men and women slightly differently. This was apparent to some degree in both the books, and in children's talk. In *A Piece of Cake* (1989) for example, it is the mother elephant who is concerned about her weight, and who makes the decisions for the family as a whole about their health, diet and physical activities. Likewise, when children talked about how they learnt about health, as well as people they had heard say they were fat, they predominantly mentioned mothers or other female family members, alongside their (female) teachers. In this way, the interaction of 'healthy living' and 'or you'll get fat discourse' tends to put particular pressure on women, positioning them as responsible for not only their own but also their family's health, and encouraging a concern with and surveillance of both weight and health. In contrast, the positions offered to men and to children simultaneously can render invisible boys and men's struggles with weight and health, while also allowing more possibility for resistance. This seemed to enable children to at times talk of refusing to eat their vegetables, despite their mothers' urging, as well as to talk of the pleasure of things like lollies and fizzy drink, as I discuss below.

'Growing big and strong' discourse also had interesting gendered implications in children's talk. In the books, this discourse is most clearly referenced in *Willy the Wimp* (1984), in relation to the male protagonist. In the excerpt below we discuss this story:

> Chloe: he's happy cos he's big and strong
> [pause- 5]
> Ria: Do you think it would be the same if he was a girl?
> [pause 2]
> Tayla: [stands up] no

Chloe: yep [nodding]
Ria: no?
Chloe: sometimes
Tayla: girls are only have like prettiness, and make boys punch theirself [.] cos I saw this on, a show, this girl like [rests her chin on her hand and makes a pouty face] and then he just went pfhh [mimes a punch to the side of her face] cos he got um punched three times [holds up three fingers]

the children show some disagreement about the role of gender here; however, Tayla references cultural stereotypes in TV shows, where strength, muscles and fighting are often primarily the realm of boys, while the girls 'have prettiness' and are the object fought over. Likewise, many of the elements of 'growing big and strong' discourse have traditionally been considered 'masculine'. Yet at other times in the discussion groups, girls as well as boys engaged enthusiastically with positive talk (and demonstrations) of strength, muscles and physical activity, as well as talk of strong women they know. For example:

Tayla: our teacher's muscles are really strong, she's like [feeling her tricep as she moves her arm]
Nicole: I_ don't have muscles_ [taking off her cardigan] {look! [holds up her arm to show her tricep also]
Chloe: {I don't [murmured]

Ria: so, how do you guys know about muscles?
Chloe: {umm_
Nicole: {(I shall) My-
Tayla: {<u>Mus</u>cles are <u>really</u> good for you [wags a finger]
Chloe: Yes!
Nicole: {My brothers abs-
Tayla: {then you can hold up really hard wood [crouching with her hands up by her ears as if she was lifting something heavy]
Ria: [laughing] your brothers abs?
Nicole: My brother <u>has</u> abs
Ria: <u>has</u> abs [laughs] …right?
Chloe: {what are abs? [looking at Nicole with a bemused expression]
Nicole: {and he like has muscles [holding both arms out bent upwards with fists clenched, jiggling them, then taps her chest]
Chloe: <u>My</u> dad has <u>strong</u> ones, <u>and</u> my mum does [smiling and playing with her pencil as she looks at Ria]
Ria: yeah?
Nicole: {<u>why</u> does your <u>mum</u>? [in a high incredulous voice, both laugh]
Chloe: {<u>I</u> don't <u>know</u> [both still laughing, Nicole covers her face with her hands leaning backwards]

Here the participants seem to move between proudly noting the strong muscles of people they know, irrespective of gender, to bewilderment about why Nicole's mum also has strong muscles; seeming to position women or mothers in a way that excludes them from the 'growing big and strong' discourse. These contradictions perhaps point to the way these discourses have been evolving, and interacting with wider

discourses of gender; for example intermingling with how feminine beauty standards have changed over time from slimness and curves, to being slim, toned and 'fit'- but not *too* muscly (Markula, 1995).

Interpreting the stories: Ambiguity and contradiction

In my multimodal analysis of the books themselves, I argued that the stories, while offering potentially critical messages (for example around critiquing body stigmatisation and valuing diversity), seemed to undermine these messages through their ambiguity and inherent contradictions. *A Piece of Cake* (1989), for example, seems to simultaneously model diet and weight-loss culture, while also offering a critique of it ("perhaps elephants are *meant* to be fat"). Likewise, *The Yoga Ogre* (2012) also seems to model fatness as a source of worry, with a main character that is both sympathetic and likeable but also in some ways a villain, causing widespread destruction of the people's town, or perhaps a warning of the consequences of being fat. *Cinderella's Bum* (2004)argues that it's okay to have bums (and other body parts) of different shapes and sizes, and that they can even be useful, but the big sister isn't convinced and will only go swimming when they realise she was trying to fit the wrong swimming costume all along (and therefore hadn't gotten fatter after all). And *Willy the Wimp* (1984) goes through all his changes to become the big strong 'hero', only to seemingly return to his old self at the end. I was therefore interested in how children made sense of this ambiguity and contradiction in the construction of health and bodies in the stories.

Anthropomorphism

A noticeable feature of the stories was their use of non-human characters, especially when focusing on body size. Both The Large Family (elephants) and Ogden (an ogre) are drawn as creatures that are typically represented as big and fat. In some ways this adds to their sympathetic presentation in the stories, and is a clever device which side-tracks some of the negative connotations often ascribed to fat human characters. It is also the basis of *A Piece of Cake* (1989)'s critical refrain: "perhaps elephants are *meant* to be fat?".

The children varied in their approval, or not, towards this message. That is, some agreed while others rejected it outright.

Levi**:** They are! [eagerly]

Nicole: it's because elephants are really {fat [emphasising with pointing gestures with both hands]
Chloe: [speaking quickly] Because elephants are very fat [pause] because_
Nicole: See that- that dad's fat, {that sister's fat
[…]
Chloe: Becau- because every other [pause] um_ [pause] elephant is fat? because they're big?
Ria: Mm?
Nicole: yeah like-
Chloe: {and they make big thumps?

Chloe**:** Because- but they needed to be fat, because they're elephants [arms spread in an explanatory gesture, pauses and then laughs, collapsing back in her chair]

Ria: {That whānau of elephants- did you think they were healthy?
Piper: Yep!
Ria: Yep?
Piper: But, elephants are meant to be fat, anyway [earnestly]
Ria: Mm? So you think Luke was right?
Piper: Yep. Cos I know that elephants are really meant to be fat.
Ria: Mm? [3] so wh=
Piper: =the more harder they try, the more fatter they're gonna get.
Ria: Mm? Why's that?
Piper: I dunno.

To these children, the idea is obviously appealing, although hard to express. On the opposite end of the spectrum, William understood but rejected the idea:

Ria: Oh! [pause] did it have any... messages about health? did you think it had good ideas, or bad ideas around health?
William: um it had bad ideas cos... elephants aren't sposed to be fat, they're s'posed to be normal
Ria: They're supposed to be normal and not fat?
William: Yes
Ria: Mm. Would the story have been different if it was about people do you think?
William: It would be different with people cos people exercise every day

Here, William clearly rejects the idea, positioning fatness as inherently *not 'normal'*, even for elephants. Likewise, even those who agreed with the idea for *elephants* often took this at face value, and disapproved of extending it, as with Piper below:

Ria: So would the story have been different if it was about tigers? If it was a family of tigers? How would that story have gone?
Piper: Good. They would have_ [3] well, if there was um, um- you know, if it was that these were lions. They would have been- got um- less fatter? Cos, lions aren't meant to be fat.

Ria: Mm?
Piper: Or if it was tigers or lions.

Ria: So what about people?
Piper: Um_ they would have got less fat.
Ria: Yeah?

Ria: Mm... so what do you think- do you think that story would have been any different if it was a family of...tigers?
Isabella: No
Ada: Yes
Isabella: Yes, it looked-
Ada: Because tigers can easily fit through doors
Ria: {they can easily fit through doors?
Ada: (cos they're thin)

In this way then, while using animal characters allowed the authors and illustrators to avoid addressing the issue of fatness head on, the trade-off is that the metaphor may well go over children's heads. That is, even if they agree with the idea that *elephants* are meant to be fat, they didn't tend to extend this to perhaps also being true for some *people*. Instead, children's comments suggest the story wouldn't be the same for lions, tigers or people because they "exercise every day", "would have got less fat" by following the healthy diet and exercise regime in the story, and would be thin and "easily fit through doors"; the reality of fat people is rendered invisible in this construction.

Likewise, it is unclear how children made sense of Ogden, as an ogre, and whether they draw any parallels to how (fat) people may feel at being excluded or made fun of for being different to assumed norms. Further, the 'solutions' the story poses remain at the individual level, suggesting Ogden change his diet and exercise behaviours. The failure of these solutions to make any difference to Ogden's body within the story, either to the size of his tum, or to the fact that he would still be a giant ogre, is perhaps a subtle critique that didn't seem to be picked up by children in their talk about the stories.

Ambiguous endings

Overall, children predominantly commented on the stories, and judged the characters, through the lens of a 'healthy living' discourse, in terms of the characters eating fruit and vegetables, and doing exercise. For

example, when asked what she thought about *A Piece of Cake* (1989), Isabella explained: "that um one was healthy, so they can get healthy? cos they ate um vegetables what's are healthy, and fruit?".

While *A Piece of Cake* (1989) and *The Yoga Ogre* (2012) were appealing to children, they seemed to engage in only limited ways with the more critical messages in the stories. In these stories healthy living (healthy vs unhealthy foods, sports and exercise) and healthy bodies (fat/thin and strong/weak) were prominently portrayed throughout images and text, and therefore perhaps more easy for children of this age to 'read'. Additionally, these discourses seem to be culturally familiar already to the six year olds I talked to. In contrast, the other subtler critical layers to these stories were perhaps too unfamiliar, or too esoteric and ambiguous, for children to connect with in much depth in their talk. Children seemed happy with the endings of both stories: that everyone got some cake, and that Ogden found an activity he could do without it being banned. In their talk about both stories children seemed to primarily focus on health in relation to eating and exercise, or ideas around not being greedy. However, their talk didn't turn towards notions of diversity or acceptance specifically, with the exception being their talk of 'not being mean'. These slight inconsistencies may suggest an alternative discourse focused around kindness and empathy, as I discuss below. However, children were divided on whether they approved of the suggestion that 'elephants might be meant to be fat'; and none of them connected this with people.

Likewise, while children readily talked about the notion of training to become bigger and stronger, and to stand up to the bullies in *Willy the Wimp* (1984), they didn't seem to know what to make of the ambiguous ending. Again, however, they judged the story somewhat positively in terms of its health messages: "Because- he was trying lots […] He was doing_ lots of different sports... and_ sports are good… for people" (Aimee).

In contrast, the final story, *Cinderella's Bum* (2004), didn't seem to connect well with children at all. While some explained that the sister was concerned about getting fatter, many also expressed bewilderment that she would worry about her bum specifically.

> Ria: My big sister's always worried about her bum.

Jane: [giggles]
Piper: aah! [laughing] why is she always worried about her <u>bum</u>?
Jane: <u>I</u> don't care about my bum
Ria: {Mm
Jane: I jst- I just- <u>live</u> with it [all laugh]
Piper: Yeah, me too [giggling] I don't care about my <u>bum</u>! who would- !? [2]
Jane: (like)
Piper: <u>Who</u> would <u>care</u> about their <u>bum</u>!?
Ria: I don't know
Jane: I really don't care about my bum-its-just-like-
Piper: =Bum's are <u>useless</u>!
Jane: yeah [laughs] bums are useless
Ria: Do you know anybody who cares about- [1] things like that?
Piper: {nope! [simultaneously]
Jane: {yep! my mum. [laughs] My bum. But actually my mum.
Ria: Yeah?
Jane: My mum (actually cares-about-)
Piper: =Bums care about bums! [loudly]

While they seem to find the whole concept of worrying about bums strange overall, Jane here does recognise this as a familiar way of talking from her mum. Likewise, a few of the participants commented that they did know people who worried about their bodies in this way (predominantly women), and related it specifically to fatness, as with Levi and Liam below:

Ria [reading]: My big sister's always worried about her bum.
Levi: [giggles]
Ria: Do you know anyone who worries about their bum? {or another part of their body?
Levi: {Ah_ my sister?
Ria: Your sister? why do you think she does that?
Levi: [with a shy grin on his face again] cos she doesn't want to be too fat?
Ria: She doesn't want to be too fat?
Jack: Look
Ria: And why do you think that is?
Levi: [2] (you look kind of - people look weird when they're fat?)

Ria: My big sister's always worried about her bum.
Liam: [chuckles] bom bom
Ria: What do you think that means?
Liam: Um
Hannah: Um
Liam: (It means you've got a fat bum!)
Hannah: [giggles]

Again here, being fat is constructed by the children as negative and undesirable, making people 'look weird', as well as humorous.

Likewise, while they accepted that things of all kinds, including body parts, come in different shapes and sizes, they did not extend this in their talk to an acceptance of body diversity. Finally they again took the ending at face value, that the initial 'problem' was resolved- she didn't have to worry about her bum because it was the wrong swimsuit, and so she hadn't gotten fatter after all.

Health vs pleasure

A key feature of healthy living discourse in my analysis of the books, was the tendency to construct health as something you *should* do, but also as *unpleasant*, placed in opposition to pleasure. This was particularly apparent when considered multimodally, the illustrations often providing tone and affect to the stories. Though at times it was also explicit; For example, *A Piece of Cake* (1989) notes of the family's new diet and exercise regime: "*It was awful. Every morning there was a healthy breakfast followed by exercises. Then there was a healthy tea followed by a healthy jog. By the time evening came everyone felt terrible"*, supported by an illustration of the whole family sprawled on the couch looking unhappy. Here then 'healthiness' is explicitly connected with feeling "awful" and "terrible".

When reading *A Piece of Cake* (1989), children empathised with how unappealing the 'healthy' food looked, and how tired and unhappy the elephants became from so much exercise; For example, while Tayla explained how healthy sardines were, Nicole found the "healthy tea" "gross".

> Nicole: Ewww! Sardines! [drops her face onto the table]
> Ria: [laughs] what do you think of <u>that</u> tea? you don't think it sounds very yummy? [Nicole shakes her head slowly with a grimace on her face] do you think it sounds healthy? [keeps shaking her head]
> […]
> Tayla: guess what- sardines are good for you [earnestly, nodding]
> Ria: you think they are?
> Nicole: I do <u>not</u> like sardines, that's gross!

Likewise, in participants' talk, a conflict between healthiness and pleasure was often apparent. This was particularly the case in relation to foods. While children were often somewhat enthusiastic about their

favourite fruits, as in their talk of what's in their lunch boxes above, vegetables and other foods were more varied. For example, Jane and Piper discuss potato in different forms…

> Jane: And_ eating potatoes {(that's the one)
> Piper: {those are vegetables, but I hate potato, but sometimes I eat it? [rocking her head from side to side]
> Jane: {Oh yeah! I like mashed potato
> Piper: {and I like chips but I hate normal potato
> Ria: Hmm
> Jane: I- I like- I like mashed potato with tomato sauce
> Ria: Mmm
> Piper: What?! (last-night-um) I had a sausage_ oh no that was the night before- wait- {last night - I
> Jane: {if you eat tomato sauce (then) you_ actually get fat [chuckles]

While they recognise potato as a 'good' vegetable, Jane and Piper explain its not one they particularly like, unless as chips, or mashed with tomato sauce. Yet for Jane this seems to turn it into another 'bad' food, once again in danger of causing you to 'actually get fat'. Additionally, 'sweet' and 'unhealthy' foods often provided a particular source of tension, as with Liam's comments below.

> Liam: that means they will have um, that all of their teeth will come out and they will be more u- all of them would be crooked?
> Ria: Mm
> Hannah: Mm, that's why I don't eat that much candy
> Liam: Mm {but I like candy
>
> Hannah: {cupcake? no...
> Liam: {gummi bear? not healthy
> Ria: Okay
> Liam: but that is kind of good...
> Hannah: {Ah- [comes to sit down again]
> Liam: {sugar- is yummy

While Hannah positions herself as obeying the rules, not eating too much candy, Liam here balances that with a focus on pleasure. Sugar and sweet things may be 'bad' in the sense that they are unhealthy, but they are also yummy and something he actually likes.

As in the stories themselves, children's expression of pleasure was particularly apparent through other modes of communication. That is, it was particularly through children's *actions*, rather than their words necessarily, that children evoked pleasure. For example, children showed great enthusiasm for the foods exemplifying unhealthy options shown in the stories, miming gobbling up the cake (in *A Piece of Cake, 1989*) and pies (*The Yoga Ogre, 2012*). For example Lara exclaimed:

Lara: I'd eat that whole cake, I'd be like [mimes stuffing it into her mouth]

James: Hmm! Yummy! [pokes the page as if he's holding a knife, cutting it up to eat himself]

William: Yeah, cos I've got that b- [turns into a loud growl] gragh! pie!
Ria: Pie?
William: [makes gobbling noises and actions]
Lucas: No! Give my pie here! [also pretends to stuff it in his mouth]
William: That's my pie!

Their enthusiasm for these foods aligns with their tempting status in the story. However, children also balanced the desirability of these foods with their understanding of them as 'treats' and 'occasional foods':

Liam: {Only, not all the time you can have sugar, only sometimes...
Hannah: Yeah evr- every we- every wednesday we have a treat, not the other days
Ria: Mm?
Liam: Only on Wednesdays and Fridays, and.. Sundays you get lollies cos... {()

Riley: And you have pudding after your dinner, sometimes
Ria: Have pudding after your dinner? yeah?

Piper: Fizzy is for_ … um_ … you know um like- um_ … fizzy you can have_ as_ an award? Or- like Mrs [Teacher] …she did an award today because um…

These constructions of sweet sugary foods allow them a small place in a healthy diet, where they can be eaten occasionally. This also provides a grey area, of how often and how much. However, their use as 'treats' and 'rewards' also seems to place them on a particular pedestal, re-emphasising their desirability, in contrast to plain or unpleasant 'healthier' choices.

Interestingly, this tension between healthiness and pleasure was less clear in terms of exercise and physical activity. In *A Piece of Cake* (1989) and *Willy the Wimp* (1984), healthy exercise is also portrayed somewhat negatively, as exhausting and unpleasant (illustrated for example by unhappy facial expressions, and gloomy backgrounds). Children picked up on this construction in their talk, for example in discussing the illustrations in *Willy the Wimp* (1984):

Ria: Do you think he's having fun? Doing …all this … training?
Chloe: Yep. {But not there [pointing to the second picture]
Tayla: {no. And then soon he-
Chloe: Not there, {not there, not there, but there [pointing at each picture in the progression again]
Ria: Mm, so why's that?
Chloe: Because he's happy cos he's big
Ria: Mm
Chloe: and strong

Chloe notes Willy's expressions as he is shown getting bigger and bigger, and it is only when he achieves his desired body, becoming big, strong and muscly, that he is shown as happy; the process of getting there is again shown as dull and unpleasant. In contrast, *The Yoga Ogre* (2012) was notable for how much Ogden seemed to be depicted as happy, with a big smile, enjoying the different sports he tried; despite not appearing to be very 'good at' them and causing widespread destruction.

In children's talk and actions during our discussions, both exercise (including typical 'fitness' activities such as jogging, weight lifting, and stretching) and sports were generally talked about – or demonstrated - with enthusiasm. Again here, children's actions seem to particularly denote pleasure, leaping up to demonstrate a wide variety of physical activities throughout the interviews. For example, Chloe and Tayla interrupted reading *Willy the Wimp* to demonstrate an assortment of 'exercises', from yoga moves and squats to jogging. Likewise, Jane and Piper express their enthusiasm for running:

> Ria: *Ogden has taken up jogging instead.* Do you guys_ like jogging, or running?
> Jane: Yeah
> Piper: Yeah, I love running! I'm like the fastest in the class
> Ria: Mm?
> Jane: I'm actually-
> Piper: The fastest girl
> Jane: Actually <u>we</u> are the fastest, cos I keep- I do this [pumps her arms really fast]

Talking about sports and exercise seemed to bring out children's competitive spirit, as well as their physical energy and enthusiasm. As above, the gendered nature of this particular comment, with an embedded assumption of physical prowess as particularly the realm of the boys, and therefore needing the proviso 'the fastest *girl*', is sad given the active and enthusiastic way participants of both genders talked about and displayed their love of physical activity. By reinforcing a version of healthy living discourse that constructs eating and exercise as about health, to the detriment of pleasure, most of the books seem to miss out on tapping into the innate joy children have in challenging themselves and experimenting with different ways to move their bodies.

Alternative discourses: Kindness and pleasure

Figure 19. Tayla's drawing of us inside a 'love heart'

As well as utilising the health and body discourses I identified in the books, at other times children seemed to bring in other discursive resources, from their wider interactions with the world. In particular, some of the contradictions in children's talk seem to invoke notions of kindness and pleasure in order to navigate the tensions and even at times critique the health and body discourses above. For example, multiple children highlighted *calling* people fat as 'not nice'; here they seem to draw on an alternative discourse of being kind, or interacting empathetically with others. Unspoken but perhaps implied here is an idea that *commenting* on others' bodies is inappropriate; which sits in opposition to 'healthy living'/'or you'll get fat' discourses in particular, in which *surveillance* of our own and others' bodies is implicitly (and even sometimes explicitly) encouraged. By drawing on a discourse of kindness here then, children shift the focus from whether someone is correctly doing/displaying 'health', to positive social interactions, being 'nice' and 'not being mean'. This seems a broad and powerful discursive resource often evoked by parents and teachers, that can be used to challenge the harsher elements of a 'healthy living'/'or you'll get fat' discourse. While not linking it to health or a critique of healthy living discourse verbally, Tayla also chose to draw the three of us inside a love heart, as shown in Figure 19.

Likewise, children occasionally seemed to use a discourse of pleasure to challenge the way 'healthy living' discourse prioritises health above all else, especially pleasure. For example, Liam's comments ('but I <u>like</u> candy'; 'sugar- is yummy') offer a rare shift in the interviews from the overriding imperative of 'healthy living' in to a recognition of embodied pleasure and enjoyment as also important, and worthy of discussion.

Discussion & Implications

My research aimed to explore the messages young primary school aged children are receiving about 'healthy bodies' in New Zealand, and how they are making sense of these messages through their talk. I was interested in the intersection between health education around healthy lifestyle choices, body image and body-based stigmatisation; issues that are often approached separately, and in potentially contradictory ways, in both literature and practice. I used picture books as a way to explore the discourses available to children, and then used a selection of these as a springboard in small group discussions with children, in a school setting.

Key questions guiding the research included:

1. How are healthy bodies constructed in children's picture books, and in particular what messages about shape/size, eating, exercise, diversity, body image and gender do they offer in relation to this?
2. How do children read, understand and engage with these messages?
3. What discourses available to children allow them to engage with the complexities of health in ways that encourage critical thinking, self-esteem and are (body) positive?

Book analyses

In order to answer my first research question, I began with a broader descriptive thematic analysis of books available to children locally through school and public libraries, exploring the ways they incorporated themes around body shape/size, food/eating, exercise/physical activity, diversity, body image and gender. It was common for the stories to revolve around a particular idea or message, and these tended to frame the kinds of constructions within the book. In this first broad analysis, books were included which explicitly focused on each of my highlighted foci of interest, as well as ones in which they arose more incidentally within the stories and illustrations (e.g. despite the story being 'about' something else). This broader initial focus allowed me to explore how the books varied widely in their approach to these issues, depending on factors such as the age of the stories, as well as their theme or topic of focus.

Notably, in this initial analysis, the types of foods, activities and bodies presented were varied and generally presented in fairly neutral ways. Here my findings echo the few examples of previous research comparing picture books to other children's media (Ata & Thompson, 2010; Byrne & Nitzke, 2000; Herbozo et al., 2004), in suggesting that picture books as a media overall may offer more neutral constructions of foods, activities and bodies. I build on this work to detail the wide variety of constructions of health and bodies present. Books explored both 'everyday' foods and activities, as well as special occasions like parties. They touched on diverse themes from over-eating, to picky eating, to the social significance of sharing food, as well as diets and 'healthy' food. Likewise, the books included deliberate exercise, as well as more incidental physical activity in terms of play and outdoor adventures. Reinforcing previous research, in my broader sample of books as a whole, alternative portrayals of both food/eating and physical activity were as common or more common than constructions of diets and exercise as health behaviours. In terms of bodies, there were few extremes in characters' body size and shape (unless this was an explicit focus of the stories as below); these predominantly tended towards an 'average' size, neither notably fat nor thin. Within the stories, individuality and diversity then was often highlighted by colour, 'liking' different foods and activities, or by including different animals, rather than variation in body size and shape. In this broad initial analysis the sample also included books looking at social relationships (including bullying), diversity, body image and self-esteem in different ways. However, while not the most common themes in the sample of books overall, healthism and anti-fat discourses were also strongly present in some of the books, particularly those focusing explicitly on health and bodies.

In the next stage of analysis, I narrowed in on the concepts of healthy bodies and being healthy, choosing seven books to analyse more deeply with a critical multimodal discourse analysis. These books all had a central focus on health and/or body size/shape; and while each approached these themes in different ways, they were arguably much less diverse than in the broader selection. Notable in this narrowed selection of books was a particular discourse of 'healthy living' involving lifestyle choices about what foods to eat, being physically active, and a 'healthist' focus on taking responsibility as an individual and as a family. Ironically, however, this 'healthy living' discourse within the books simultaneously constructed

healthy things as what you *should* do, but also as boring and unpleasant, contrasted with unhealthy but desirable alternatives. This became particularly clear when examining the books' illustrations, and the different way foods and activities were constructed; elements of colour and positioning within images for example providing a clear affective contrast between the unhealthy foods (e.g. cake) and the healthy ones (e.g. vegetables, dinners). Here then, health was placed in opposition to pleasure. Likewise, deliberate exercise was presented in text and illustrations as unpleasant but as something that needs doing or that has a desirable end goal, similar to the notion of "no pain, no gain".

In exploring the books' constructions of bodies in this second analysis, what was notable was the level of ambiguity and contradiction. Intertwined with the above discourse of 'healthy living' were two contrasting (though not necessarily contradictory) discourses of the body: a 'big and strong' discourse and an 'or you'll get fat' discourse. Fatness was a key feature in four of the books, a fat body constructed as a negative consequence of particular lifestyle choices, and as a failing of the characters portrayed that way; often seeming to tie in with 'obesity discourse' (Evans, Davies, et al., 2008; Gard & Wright, 2001, 2005; Monaghan et al., 2013; Rich et al., 2010; Rich & Evans, 2005; Wright et al., 2012). Attention was drawn, through words and images, to the quantity and type of food these characters ate and to their inactivity; and they were generally positioned as unhappy, unable and humorous. Such constructions can work to reinforce negative understandings of fatness and contribute to fat stigma. A few of the stories also drew on a positive construction of big, strong and healthy bodies as desirable, to be achieved by body work (particular diet and exercise choices). While the books in this narrower selection did also at times hint at notions of bodily acceptance and diversity (e.g. that body parts come in different shapes and sizes, and that elephants might be *meant* to be fat), these tended to be undermined by the narratives and multimodal interplay within the stories.

How did these play out in children's talk?

To answer my second research question, to explore how children made sense of these complex and ambiguous messages, I utilised key books from this multimodal analysis as prompts in discussion groups

with five and six year old children, within a school context. I met with children in small groups (of 1-3 children at a time) and asked them about their ideas of what 'being healthy' involves, reading the picture books together as well as providing an opportunity for them to draw as well as talk about their ideas. My results support previous research (Burrows, 2008; D. Powell & Fitzpatrick, 2013; Pugmire & Lyons, 2018) in finding that children from a young age are well versed in 'healthy living'. In talking about 'being healthy', they primarily focused on food and eating, naming different fruits and vegetables as healthy; as well as not eating too many sweet or sugary things.

As in the books I examined, language around health as what you 'should' do was notable in the children's talk. In this school context, children eagerly took up the role of 'teachers'; even going so far in some groups as to talk directly to the camera to outline a number of 'health rules', particularly around what you should and shouldn't eat. Children also referred to making healthy choices not just in terms of what you eat and do, but also what you buy; and about passing these instructions on to their parents. Here then, children's talk highlights how healthy living discourses put pressure on children (and their families) to know and do health correctly, particularly in terms of what they eat and buy, and with a specific focus on what goes in school lunch boxes. They also extended to a lesser extent to being physically active, and limiting screen time. These findings echo how children and families are being positioned as 'agents of change' in school health promotion initiatives in New Zealand (Burrows, 2017), as well as how schools have become a nexus for concerns about children's bodies and health, and increasingly subject to surveillance and policing by both teachers and peers (Pluim et al., 2018; Tanner et al., 2019).

Both the body discourses I identified in the books were even more strongly apparent in children's talk. That is, children's talk about being healthy was also tied up with constructions of the body as healthy (thin, strong, muscly) or not (fat, weak). At times, children related healthiness to being big and strong, and to having strong muscles. Even more so than in the books, children clearly constructed a big, strong, muscular body as desirable, and as a positive consequence of healthy living behaviours; talking about *becoming* healthy with comments such as 'you eat healthy food, you get super strong', and showing me their muscles

and physical abilities. Previous work on body image concerns and children have highlighted the need to consider notions such as bigness, muscularity and athleticism, as well as thinness-fatness, especially for boys (Dion et al., 2016; Hoffmann & Warschburger, 2019; Kantanista et al., 2015; M. P. McCabe & Ricciardelli, 2005; Muise et al., 2003; Tatangelo et al., 2018; Tatangelo & Ricciardelli, 2013); and this was clear in both boys' and girls' talk about bodies and health here.

Unsurprisingly given on-going concerns about 'childhood obesity' and previous work on how this has infused thinking about health education (e.g. Burrows, 2010b), fatness also featured prominently in children's talk. While the specific medical language of 'obesity' was unfamiliar to children, the negative focus on fatness was not. Children clearly constructed fatness, specifically having a fat tummy, as an undesirable consequence of *failing* to do 'healthy living' correctly; that is, of eating too much of the wrong kinds of foods, and of being inactive. Likewise, in reading the stories with fat characters, they positioned the characters' fatness as problematic, as "*too* big" and "*too* fat" and as "not healthy". These characters were encouraged by children to eat less (in general), to eat less 'bad' or 'unhealthy' foods, and to eat more fruits and vegetables, as well as to "get exercise" in order to get rid of their fatness.

Within these intertwining discourses of health and bodies children seem to be encouraged to surveille their own and others' bodies, and judge them as thin/fat, strong/weak, healthy/unhealthy. Yet they are also aware that to do so is considered unkind, and that judgements of fatness in particular are given wide-ranging negative connotations and social sanctions. The children I talked to were well aware of fatness as something to be laughed at and derided, which meant people might not want to play with you; as well as something rude and mean to call people. Below I consider some of the implications of these health and body discourses in more depth, including what they exclude, and what they may mean for how children engage with others and their own bodies.

Implications of healthy living discourse, and health vs pleasure

What do healthy living discourses exclude? What are the implications for how they make us think/act/feel?

A key aspect of the way children talk about making healthy choices, utilising a healthy living discourse, focuses on not having too many sweet things. Children explained that sugar and sweet things are bad for you, and should be avoided or limited. However, these were also clearly associated with pleasure. A focus on sweet things as 'bad' and unhealthy creates tensions for children between things they find pleasurable, and imperatives to make healthy choices. Additionally, and somewhat ironically, by placing health and pleasure in opposition, these particular discourses of healthy living exclude an appreciation of healthy things *as* pleasurable and 'yummy'. Inadvertently reinforced is a dichotomy between boring but 'good' healthy things and tempting but 'bad' unhealthy things. This is concerning given the counter-productive effect it is likely to have on actual behaviour change (Cappellen et al., 2018), as well as the implications for how it is likely to make children feel, being torn between two unhappy alternatives. They are put into a position of feeling guilty if they enjoy sweet things or other quintessential 'bad' foods such as pies, while at the same time these are reinforced as desirable and pleasurable. They are stuck between two negative outcomes; miss out on something they enjoy, or feel guilty for making the 'wrong' choice. Likewise, rendered invisible is how yummy healthy foods can be, or an appreciation of variety. Within such a construction, only fruit occasionally gets to be *both* healthy and yummy. A focus on avoiding sugar also allows exploitation through advertising of 'sugar free' products to be understood as 'healthy', without regard to any of their other (often highly refined) ingredients, or whether they contain any nutritional value. In this way then, Liam navigated this dilemma by talking about his choice of 'sugar free' lollies as a healthy choice.

Such a focus aligns with wider obesity discourse, in which sugar has often been linked to the so-called ‘obesity epidemic’ (Supski et al., 2021); and indeed has even been argued to have replaced obesity as ‘public enemy number one’ in public health campaigns (Throsby, 2018). However, while concerns about the health effects of sugar have become more deeply embedded in Western middle class consciousness, in everyday life this must be balanced with its ineffable allure, and the complex social meanings of sweet foods. In discussing this tension in family life, Supski et al (2021) discuss the notion of “contradictory pleasures” (p. 45), to explore how seemingly contradictory ideas and feelings about food can co-exist for a family, and the work that families do to negotiate these tensions. In their case study of a white middle class Australian family, concern about the ‘evils’ of sugar, reinforced by popular cultural representations of food as well as public health messages encountered in a variety of contexts (school, dentist, doctor’s office etc), sit in tension alongside constructions of home-made sweet treats as linked with celebration, pleasure, love and family bonding. Echoing the key role of cake in the stories examined here, they focus on birthday cakes as symbolic of this tension; playing an important role in family ritual and tradition, and reaffirming familial relationships. As they argue, “cake (and by implication sugar) is regarded as quintessential celebration food – it is a treat” (p.56). Supski et al. note how the decadence and display of this family’s birthday cake tradition sits outside of the normal family food practices, which have evolved after viewing a documentary on sugar to reading the ingredients of everyday family foods such as breakfast cereals to track and reduce sugar consumption. The family’s approach to food involves a pragmatic balancing of sugar ‘treats’, in moderation, with being mindful of how much they consume on an everyday basis. They clearly show how the children (aged 6, 12 and 14) “have become effective health advocates in the family” (p. 60), sharing messages they receive from school and policing each others’ consumption. Likewise, even the five and six year old children in the current study spoke about advising their mum what to buy, while the notion of these sweet foods as ‘yummy’ and as okay to have ‘sometimes’ was also notable; their talk working to negotiate these contradictory positions.

In the increasingly common surveillance of school lunches (both canteens and lunch boxes from home), sweet and sugary foods often become a particular target (Pluim et al., 2018; Supski et al., 2021). Yet this

can fail to recognise the complex motivations that go into putting together children's lunch boxes, balancing pressures around time, expense, and what kids will actually eat. Further, a blanket rejection of 'sweet treats' often means the rejection of home-made baking, and elides the meanings this can hold for families; and can disadvantage families who have different cultural traditions around food (Burrows, 2021; Maher et al., 2020; Pluim et al., 2018; Tanner et al., 2019; Warin, 2021; Warin et al., 2019). Such surveillance practices have a tendency to invoke anxiety and guilt for both children and their families, especially mothers on whom the burden to balance mothering discourses of nurturance with caretaking of family health and diet often falls disproportionately (Madden & Chamberlain, 2004; Maher et al., 2010, 2020; Supski et al., 2021; Tanner et al., 2019; Warin, 2021; Warin et al., 2019; Zivkovic et al., 2010).

Interestingly, this feature of healthy living discourse in the books explicitly about health, in which food was divided into healthy but unpleasant in opposition to sweet and yummy, contrasts with the references to food in the wider selection of books I examined. When food was referenced in relation to other themes, such as exploring picky eating or individual tastes and preferences, or as part of socialisation, food was constructed in a more neutral way. For example, in *Piggy Poggett* (2009) the narration notes the little pig's likes (slops), dislikes (porridge, peas) and loves (corn). Here different vegetables are explored in relation to personal preferences, and indeed a vegetable is constructed as highly desirable in terms of yumminess not just 'goodness' (though the story goes on to demonstrate that you can have too much of a good thing). The common theme in the wider selection of books of changing tastes (e.g. *I Will Never Not Ever Eat a Tomato,* 2003) also encourages children to think of these preferences as fluid rather than fixed, highlighting how you can discover delicious and pleasurable foods in unexpected places.

Likewise, while the 'healthy living' books constructed over-eating negatively in relation to fatness, or as a special diet for bulking up (through a 'growing big and strong' discourse), in the broader selection of books this was constructed more neutrally in terms of satisfying hunger (e.g. *The Tiger Who Came to Tea, 1968*) or as a casual and easy-to-make mistake (*The Very Hungry Caterpillar, 1969;* and *Piggy Poggett, 2009*) which the characters' are alerted to by how their bodies feel. Interestingly two of these stories are much older

'classics', perhaps highlighting shifts over time in discourses of food and health. However, none of the books I examined explicitly highlighted the kind of eating emphasised by a modern *Health At Every Size* (HAES) approach, balancing eating for hunger, satiety, nutritional needs and pleasure (Bacon, 2010).

While the books I examined also had a tendency to emphasise exercise-for-health-and-fitness as boring, exhausting and unpleasant, thankfully this did not seem to be taken up so readily in children's talk. Rather, while children also noted different types of exercise and stretching as 'good for you' and occasionally as tiring or hard work, they also talked about (and demonstrated physically) physical movement in positive ways, challenging themselves and talking about what they enjoyed to do. Likewise in the wider selection of books, exercise and physical activity often featured in more incidental ways, and was constructed much more neutrally or positively. This was often an incidental part of play and socialisation, with characters shown doing diverse activities from more structured ones such as going to the gym or playing soccer, to more general adventures that included elements such as climbing trees, jumping streams, dancing or swimming. It is unfortunate then that this diversity and positivity is often lost in constructions of physical activity in relation to health, within the dominant healthy living discourse highlighted here.

Implications of healthy body discourses

As I have explored, healthy living discourse was also intertwined in some children's books and in children's talk with body discourses; specifically tending to utilise either an 'or you'll get fat' discourse or a 'growing big and strong' discourse. In the former, like in the wider fatness and obesity discourses I discussed in my introduction, being fat is understood as 'not normal', but rather a consequence of eating too much bad/unhealthy food and being inactive. Here fatness is held up as a negative consequence of failing to do healthy living correctly; something to be feared and scorned. Indeed at times both popular media and health promotion deliberately play on constructions of fat as revolting, attempting to invoke fear and disgust as an ineffectual behaviour change strategy, not unlike that utilised in anti-smoking campaigns, despite the dubious ethics of such an approach (Pausé, 2017).

This discourse simplifies body diversity and complexity into the size of one's tummy, to being 'fat' or not. Along with a label of being 'fat' comes a judgement of being greedy and lazy, lacking in willpower. This was referenced powerfully in some of the stories I examined, such as *Flabby Cat & Slobby Dog* (2010)*;* and by implication in children's talk. Likewise, in both stories and children's talk, fatness was often evoked as a source of humour, something uncomfortable, and to be laughed at. Even the more sympathetic fat characters still tended to be the object of jokes, particularly around the quantity they eat, and their ineptitude. Fatness was associated with being unable - particularly with failing physical challenges - and with breaking things. Finally, it also came with negative social sanctions; being left out. For example, the illustration in *The Yoga Ogre* (2012) of Ogden at the far end of the bench from 'the people' showed this idea powerfully, and was one children also engaged with in their talk.

This discourse clearly makes fatness an undesirable way to be positioned, to be avoided at all costs; and seems to encourage children to surveille their own and others' bodies, in order to judge their healthiness. It is concerning to think what children's use of this discourse may lead to in the way they interact with others and with their own bodies. Fat stigma is not new; but may have grown even stronger over time (Latner & Stunkard, 2003). As I discussed in my introductory chapter it has wide-ranging negative consequences for people of all ages, shapes and sizes- but especially for fat children and adults. For young people, this may range from teasing and harassment at home and school, bullying, lower self-esteem, less engagement with physical activity, and increased risks of depression and disordered eating. It can severely impact fat people's relationships and identities throughout their lives, and even directly impact their metabolic health (Pausé, 2017; Pont et al., 2017; Puhl & Latner, 2007). It remains an on-going challenge then, given the way that health and body discourses tend to interact, to promote healthy living in a way that doesn't reinforce fat stigma.

However, interestingly while children in the current study readily used this clear-cut negative construction of fatness in relation to their knowledge of being healthy, and the characters in the stories, their talk did sometimes become more nuanced when talking about real people in their lives. Here for example Tayla at

times challenged a wholly negative construction of fatness in relation to her dad, exploring the idea that someone could be fit and strong *and* fat. Likewise, others have explored what children and young people *do* with the clear-cut prescriptions of healthy living discourse, sometimes drawing on these to make judgements of others, while at other times troubling the ways they fail to align with lived experience (Burrows, 2010b; Burrows & McCormack, 2014; Pugmire, 2012). For example, (especially older children) at times point out the failure of such a supposedly simple 'solution' of eating vegetables and being active (as proposed by intertwined 'healthy living' and fat discourses) to manifest change in their own or others' larger bodies, no matter how hard they try (Burrows, 2010b; Burrows & McCormack, 2014). Likewise, children may also struggle to merge the simplistic and negative constructions of 'fatness' with the reality of those they love. For example, in my previous research children showed a tendency to hedge their language, suggesting that family members were only 'a little bit' or 'not really' fat (Pugmire, 2012).

In the current study, children also drew on another way of constructing bodies in relation to health: a growing big and strong discourse. Here healthy eating and exercise/effort help you to grow big, strong and healthy. This discourse referenced different aspects of a large body, particular being large and muscly. Further it positions large bodies in a much more positive light; as natural diversity, or as part of growing up. This discourse also seems to align with key themes in the wider selection of books I examined. For example, as I have discussed, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (1969) is a much older 'classic' story which contains themes around eating and body size; however, in this story the increasing quantities of food devoured by the caterpillar are constructed in a positive light, as part of growing big and strong enough to build its chrysalis and transform into a beautiful butterfly. Likewise, *Tell Me What It's Like to Be Big* (2001), and *Guess How Much I Love You* (1994) both explore themes of growing bigger as part of growing up, in which these are constructed in positive ways.

Other stories also drew on these more positive constructions of being 'big' simply as an accepted part of who the characters are. For example, in the *Tiger Who Came to Tea* (1968), the tiger is a large character who eats and drinks huge quantities; however, in this story this is accepted as part of being a large hungry

(though notably not 'fat') tiger. There is no pressure for him to change, despite the inconvenience he causes; an interesting contrast to Ogden's story. Likewise, *Big & Small* (2014) features a large bear character who is portrayed in a positive light, simply with different strengths and weaknesses than his smaller companion. This latter story seems to intertwine a 'big and strong' discourse, with one of diversity; and wasn't alone in the books for doing so. A similar diversity discourse was apparent in books such as *Frog is Frog* (1998), *Wheelie Girl* (2007), and *Blue Gnu* (2012), which all highlight differences in bodies and abilities as positive aspects of being different and unique, with characters coming to be accepted and to accept themselves for who they are.

Notably there was little overlap between the books focused on 'health' and those with themes of diversity, body acceptance and self-esteem; and where this did occur it seemed to be undermined within the story. Likewise, in the discussion groups where 'health' and 'being healthy' were the explicit focus of discussion, children made surprisingly little reference to these ideas, with the limited exceptions of a few comments about the importance of being kind or not being mean, and Tayla's talk of being big, strong *and* fat. The potential to read *A Piece of Cake* (1989)*, The Yoga Ogre* (2012), and *Cinderella's Bum* (2004) in light of these kind of body diversity messages seemed to either be too undermined by the contradictions inherent in these stories, or overlooked in the discussion group context where 'health' was the focus.

Likewise, while on the surface appearing contrary to a negative 'big and fat' discourse, the 'growing big and strong' discourse that children utilised in relation to being healthy still seems to focus on the aesthetics of the body, and to highlight some bodies as more desirable than others. While it seemed to hold the potential for a subtle challenge to negative fat discourses, as Tayla seemed to be trying to explore, in practice it often seemed to be overruled by fat discourse once someone was positioned as 'big *and fat*' rather than simply 'big'. It would be valuable to further explore ways to *integrate* ideas of health with those of diversity, body acceptance and self-esteem; when and how these discourses do interact, and the potential for this to be used to provide a more balanced and integrated health curriculum.

Returning to the research questions

1. How are healthy bodies constructed in children's picture books, and in particular what messages about shape/size, eating, exercise, diversity, body image and gender do they offer in relation to this?

Returning to my first research question, healthy bodies were constructed in a variety of ways in the picture books I examined. Overall, health was not a particularly common focus of the broader sample of books. While bodies, food/eating and physical activity featured incidentally in many of the stories, overall these were constructed neutrally and with an awareness of the diverse personal and social meanings these can hold; for example moving your body was more likely to be constructed around notions of play and adventures rather than exercise per se. Messages about diversity, being different, and bigness/smallness were particularly common. However in the books 'about' health, constructions most often aligned with healthist and anti-fat discourses.

2. How do children read, understand and engage with these messages?

To answer my second question, I read three to four of the books with a strong focus on health and bodies with children, in a mixture of individual interviews and small groups. Children engaged with the books in a variety of ways. While they enjoyed the humour in the stories, they seemed to find some of the books a bit confronting or rude in their focus on things like fatness and bottoms. They tended to interpret the stories through a healthist lens, judging the characters' healthiness by what they ate and the exercise they did, as well as their (non)fatness. They also had mixed responses to the more critical features of the stories, sometimes agreeing and sometimes challenging them.

3. What discourses available to children allow them to engage with the complexities of health in ways that encourage critical thinking, self-esteem and are (body) positive?

My third research question was an ambitious one, though valuable in helping to explicitly orient the research towards a political goal, looking for solutions. It sought to identify discourses in children's media that engage with the complexities and nuances of health; and to particularly value ones which would simultaneously help kids to feel good in their bodies, to enhance self-esteem and body positivity. However, the degree to which I could engage with this question was limited by my book sample. In this study I focused on collecting books that were readily available locally, and being borrowed/read by children. I aimed to include a broad range of books with different themes relating to my key ideas; however, I did not deliberately search out critically oriented stories. Therefore, newer and rarer books may have been missed by my sampling. While diversity and self-esteem were common themes in my broad sample of books, these tended to focus on ideas such as colour, food preferences, (dis)ability, and body size in terms of being big or small. Those books that did engage directly with health and fatness did sometimes include some critical ideas, but were also notable for their ambiguity. This third research question therefore remains an ongoing challenge, with the potential for further research.

Teaching health: Interventions with children

Previous work has highlighted how concerns about obesity have come to be heavily embedded in health and physical education in NZ schools, with a wide range of programmes (Burrows, 2010a, 2010b; Burrows & McCormack, 2014; D. Powell, 2010), and the involvement of diverse stakeholders, including corporations wanting to be seen as 'part of the solution' rather than the problem (D. Powell, 2013; D. Powell & Gard, 2014). Such campaigns seem to have shaped children's recognition of how to do health and be healthy, particularly around the desirability of eating lots of fruit and vegetables, and being active. While the young children in my study did not specifically reference by name any of the health initiatives which have been active in NZ schools (except for a passing reference by one group to *"Jump Jam"* as their fitness lesson for the day), the general influences of these health discourses seem to be apparent in their talk.

While a knowledge of what is and isn't healthy might be considered beneficial, there is a tendency for this to be oversimplified as a convenient public health message, especially for children. Further, the conveyance of health messages is not uncomplicated. The ways in which our relatively critical health curriculum collides with public health directives (Fitzpatrick & Burrows, 2017) and the personal and political positioning of teachers (Burrows & McCormack, 2012) complicates what individual children experience as health and physical education in the classroom. Likewise, the apparently philanthropic involvement of corporations in collaborating to offer many of these programmes in schools is concerning, and serves to reinforce a shift in responsibility, whereby children are positioned as "self-governing citizen-consumers" (p. 226) responsible for managing their own health and fatness (D. Powell, 2013). Such programmes have a tendency to emphasise the 'risks' of fatness, a simplistic energy balance model, as well as to attempt to pass responsibility to children to make the 'right' choices (D. Powell, 2013; D. Powell & Gard, 2014); distilling down to an '"eat less, exercise more" message [that] has been widely criticised as simplistic and ineffective. This point is reinforced by the failure of even quite sophisticated and elaborate school-based interventions to have an appreciable effect on children's body weight or health' (D. Powell & Gard, 2014, p. 10). By reinforcing 'obesity' as an education problem, attention is drawn away from the socio-cultural, political, environmental and economic determinants of children's health. Such a construction comes up against the practicalities of the (classed) everyday lives of families, including vast social, economic and environmental inequalities in which children and families live; complexities which are often glossed over in public health initiatives (Graham et al., 2018; Throsby, 2018; Warin, 2021; Warin et al., 2019). Likewise recent work suggests a disconnect between the clear 'health knowledge' children exhibit in a school setting, and the complexities of their everyday lives and practices (Burrows, 2021; Maher et al., 2020; Tanner et al., 2019; Warin, 2021; Warin et al., 2019). As I argued in my introduction, concerns about obesity have also come to eclipse other health issues, including body image concerns and fat stigma. Yet if we are to 'do no harm' (O'Dea, 2005), then clearly a more integrated approach is necessary. Such a collaboration needs to be approached with caution, however. For example, Beausoleil (2008) in Canada and Moulding (2007) in Australia have both written about organisations aiming to promote health and positive body image which

have been hampered by their own “contradictory and maybe irreconcilable assumptions attempt[ing] to promote critical social advocacy and individual responsibility at the same time, with the consequence that their social marketing approach undermined their critical perspective” (Beausoleil, 2008, p. 98).

Reflections on the research process

This research provides insight into the discourses of health and bodies children are coming across in their everyday lives, and how children interact with these. Such discursive understandings are always situated. For example, notable here, the person of the researcher, and context of discussion groups in a classroom setting within a New Zealand primary school, are both crucial influences on the discourses drawn upon. Children’s eagerness to demonstrate their knowledge of healthy living in relation to different foods, for example, may have been particularly stimulated by the school setting and healthy eating campaigns in schools. However, the discourses drawn upon by children in the current research were consistent with my own previous work with children in a home setting (Pugmire, 2012), and with research with slightly older children in other Western countries (e.g. Wright et al., 2012).

Research work with early school age children provides both valuable insight and challenges. As I noted in the Introductory chapter, health and bodies are issues which children must negotiate from a young age; and involve public concerns in which increasingly young children have been targeted. Exploring these issues with children, and highlighting children’s voices, is therefore a valuable contribution to our understanding. However, certainly involves challenges including communication, how to engage children about abstract issues, and a balance between depth of exploration and keeping discussions short enough not to drag or become too boring for participants. Likewise, a particular challenge in discussion groups was the balance between allowing the conversation to flow freely (both to aid in rapport as well as to not exclude valuable but unexpected data) but also to keep discussions focused. Children loved being part of a special research group, and were eager to share their ideas and experiences about a range of topics.

Reading books and drawing pictures provided useful prompts for focusing children's discussion about being healthy. As hoped, I feel these helped to engage children in familiar and enjoyable activities, and to give them something to *do* (when sitting still and focusing could be a challenge). However, clearly these choices of prompts also shaped talk in particular ways. For example, drawing fruits and vegetables may have been a lot more accessible and familiar to children, than trying to represent some of the more complex potential understandings of 'being healthy' (though a few did do drawings to demonstrate other concepts such as drink, running and TV; as well as Tayla's drawing of us inside a heart).

Likewise the particular choice of books was very important in shaping discussions. It was a pity that practical considerations meant only 3-4 books could be read with each group. While the focus in this research was on how children interpreted the messages in readily available picture books within their talk, a more critically-focused book selection would likely have opened up different ways of talking. For example, in my previous research (Pugmire, 2012) reading books such as *I Like Me* (2009) seemed to open up more space for children to explore concepts around diversity and self-esteem in relation to being healthy.

Utilising a multimodal analysis was crucially important for both the analysis of the books themselves, and for representing children's communication, which went beyond just verbal. Likewise, utilising multiple modes allowed a deeper exploration of the tensions and contradictions within the stories, highlighting the way different modes (particularly the written text and visual illustrations) interacted to create meaning. In all of the stories, the visual elements were particularly important for conveying affect, and so changing the tone of the narrative in important ways. Children's 'reading' of the illustrations at the same time as they listened to the story, was clear in their comments and interpretations, and provided useful data to be explored. Such an approach could offer useful insight into young children's engagement with other complex social topics, and different children's media.

The utilisation of different modes of inquiry holds promise for furthering our understandings of how to critically engage with children about health and the body. More research prioritising critical and subversive understandings would be beneficial here. For example, Beausoleil and Petherick (2015) also utilised

drawings in their focus groups with children, and highlight how they offered a way "to tease out subversive identities and understandings" (p. 410) around embodiment and pleasure, often lost in health promotion imperatives.

Future Research

Research on body image programs with older children and adolescents has suggested that enhancing self-esteem and media literacy both hold particular potential as avenues for intervention. However, given the young age at which children seem to be picking up both simplistic healthist discourses and body stereotypes, further investigation of the types of interventions that may be appropriate for younger children seems valuable. Picture books do seem to be a medium that may be less embedded with healthism and obesity discourses, and so offer a potential haven from these messages circulating in children's wider discursive milieu; however, they also vary greatly, and even those stories with a critical bent do need to be examined carefully for how they may be 'read' by children, including via different modes.

Health promotion efforts need to take care not to buy into the negative constructions of 'doing health' implicated here in dominant 'healthy living' discourse in relation to fatness, eating and exercise. Rather, there is a potential to build instead on children's joy in moving their bodies and challenging themselves physically. Likewise, healthy eating too could be engaged with through a more positive lens, with recognition for the diverse meanings of food and eating for individuals and families. Finally, we need to remove a focus on fighting obesity from health education (Burrows et al., 2018; Pausé & Burrows, 2016). Here, a Health at Every Size (HAES) approach could offer a valuable alternative beyond a weight-centric approach (Bacon & Aphramor, 2011; Mansfield & Rich, 2013); one which emphasises pleasure and intuitive eating and movement irrespective of body size/shape, aligns with broader holistic perspectives of health, and focuses also on accessibility and the socio-cultural context. Indeed, engaging a more body-positive and

holistic approach ironically holds potential to reduce the risk not just of body dissatisfaction and unhealthful body management behaviours, but also of obesity (Bacon & Aphramor, 2011; Bray et al., 2018; Gard, 2011; Wilksch et al., 2015) and could build on the association between a positive body image and physical activity levels (Kantanista et al., 2015). Importantly it also offers a more socially just approach, challenging the extensive harms of fat stigma (Pausé, 2017).

One programme designed specifically for working with young children (4-8 years old) utilised just such a picture book methodology (Dohnt & Tiggemann, 2008; Mills & Osborn, 2003). *Shapesville,* a simple rhyming picture book, attempts to promote self-acceptance and celebrate diversity, as well as offering information on healthy eating and exercise. It describes a selection of characters who each are different shapes and colours, and have their own unique interests and talents. While one study assessing the impacts of using this resource with young girls found some promising results (Dohnt & Tiggemann, 2008) the current study suggests more work investigating how children integrate such stories within their wider health knowledge may be beneficial.

Interestingly, *Shapesville* utilises non-human characters, specifically geometric shapes, as a metaphor to represent being 'different shapes, sizes and colours'. In the current study, young children seemed to not necessarily extend such metaphors from the picture books beyond the specific details (for example applying the mantra from *A Piece of Cake* (1989), that perhaps elephants were 'meant to be fat', beyond elephants). Further, children interpreted such stories within the broader contexts of the discourses they are exposed to at both school and home; which led at times to actively resisting such messages in the stories. Further research would be valuable to examine children's complex reading of such stories. Additionally, it may be important to provide resources alongside such books for engaging children in critical discussion of the ideas.

Conclusion

Building on previous research, this study explored both the kinds of constructions of bodies and health presented in popular children's picture books available to children locally, as well as how children negotiate these healthy body discourses. Supporting previous research, my wider analysis of the meanings available in a broad selection of picture books suggests that healthism and obesity discourses are not particularly common in picture books; rather, food, physical activity and bodies featured in fairly diverse ways. Indeed some of the most common themes overall involved notions of diversity, social relationships, and self-acceptance. However, while the books offered a range of constructions, books that were more obviously 'about' health did tend to offer healthist constructions that reinforced a focus on individual responsibility through healthy living (eating and exercise behaviours), as well as simplistic relationships with the body. Both the books themselves, and children's reading of them, tended to equate health with eating fruit and vegetables, being active, and not being fat. Notably, children of both genders in this study put more emphasis on being strong and having muscles in relation to health, as well as tending to construct physical activity in more positive ways (compared to the books). However, while at times being big and strong was constructed in a positive light; in contrast fat characters were generally still viewed negatively, being constructed as humorous, unable, and having failed to live up to the accepted dictates of 'healthy living'. Children showed a clear awareness of fatness as an insult, with dire social consequences. They tended to construct fatness as something that you can and should change, suggesting 'simple' solutions as dictated by a healthy living discourse, such as eating more fruits and vegetables. In examining the books about health more deeply with an MMDA, it was notable that while the books examined here did include some critiquing of healthism, this was often undermined within the stories; and was generally not taken up by children in their talk about the books. This study adds to our understanding of how children negotiate healthy body discourses in their talk, and reinforces the need to continue to explore how to engage with children about health and media literacy in more critical ways, avoiding the pitfalls of fat stigma, and instead valuing self-esteem and body-positivity.

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Appendix 1

Full book list

No	Author(s)	Illustrator(s)	Date (originally published)	Title	Publisher	Place
1	Ahlberg, Janet & Allan		1981	*Peepo!*	Penguin Random House	UK
2	Allan, Nicholas		2004	*Cinderella's Bum**	Red Fox	UK
3	Allen, Pamela		2013	*Fat Ferdie*	Penguin Random House	Aus
4	Andrews, Jane		2008	*Zoe and the Wishing Star*	Piccadilly Press	UK
5	Bedford, David	Jellett, Tom	2013	*Sylvester & Arnold*	Little Hare	UK
6	Bennett, Elizabeth	Chapman, Jane	2014	*Big and Small*	Tiger Tales	USA
7	Bently, Peter	Rickerty, Simon	2012	*The Yoga Ogre**	Simon & Schuster	UK
8	Blabey, Aaron		2009	*Sunday Chutney*	Penguin Random House	USA
9	Bradshaw, Gillian	Cox, David	1999	*Shock Monday*	Lothian	Aus
10	Browne, Anthony		1984	*Willy the Wimp**	Walker Books	USA
11	Carle, Eric		1969	*The Very Hungry Caterpillar**	World Publishing Company	UK
12	Chandler, Susan	Odriozola, Elena	2004	*Vegetable Glue**	Meadowside	UK
13	Child, Lauren		2003	*I Will Never Not Ever Eat a Tomato*	Candlewick	USA
14	Cole, Babette		1999	*Bad Habits*	Dial	USA
15	Cole, J, Cole, J, & Degan, B		1995	*The Magic School Bus: Inside Ralphie - A Book About Germs*	Scholastic	USA
16	Dodd, Lynley		2002	*Hedgehog Howdedo*	Puffin	NZ
17	Donaldson, Julia	Roberts,	2010	*The Gruffalo*	MacMillan	UK

		David				
18	Dr Seuss		1960	*Green Eggs & Ham*	Random House	USA
19	Dunbar, Joyce		2001	*Tell Me What It's Like To Be Big*	Random House	UK
20	Edwards, Hazel	Niland, Deborah	2007	*Look Theres A Hippopotamus In The Playground Eating Cake*	Penguin Random House	Aus
21	Ferguson, Sarah	Cunliffe, Ian	2010	*Matthew and the Bullies*	Sterling	USA
22	Jones, Ursula	Russell Ayto	2008	*The Witch's Children Go to School*	Orchard Books	UK
23	Kann, Victoria & Elizabeth		2007	*Purplicious*	Harper Collins	USA
24	Kerr, Judith		1968	*The Tiger Who Came To Tea*	Harper Collins	UK
25	Latimer, Miriam		2007	*Wheelie Girl*	Hodder Childrens books	UK
	Mahy, Margaret		1969	*A Lion in the Meadow*	JM Dent & Sons	NZ
26	Moulton, Mark Kimball	Good, Karen Hillard	2008	*Reindeer Christmas*	Simon & Schuster	USA
27	McBratney, Sam	Jeram, Anita	1994	*Guess How Much I Love You*	Walker Books	UK
28	Mcmillan, Dawn	Kinnaird, Ross	2012	*I Need a New Bum*	Oratia Media	NZ
29	Mewburn, Kyle		2012	*Blue Gnu*	Scholastic	NZ
30	Murphy, Jill		1989	*The Large Family: A Piece of Cake**	Walker Books	UK
31	Osment, Michelle		2007	*Perky the Pukeko*	Little Friends Publishing	NZ
32	Sarah Duchess of York	Robin Preiss Glasser	2012	*Tea for Ruby*	Simon & Schuster	UK
33	Sarah Dyer		2010	*Monsters Day At Work*	Lincoln Children's Books	
34	Sendak, Maurice		1963	*Where the Wild Things Are*	Harper & Row	UK
35	Smith, Craig	Katz Cowley	2009	*The Wonky Donkey*	Scholastic	NZ
36	Sommerset, Mark & Rowan		2013	*I Love Lemonade*	Dreamboat Books	NZ

37	Springstubb, Tricia	Newman, Jeff	2013	*Phoebe and Digger*	Candlewick	USA
38	Steve Smallman	Daniel Howarth	2011	*Daisy Dinosaur Gets Lost*	QED Publishing	UK
39	Tulloch, Scott		2009	*Piggy Pogget*	Harper Collins	NZ
40	Velthuijs, Max		1998	*Frog is Frog*	Andersen	UK
41	Whybrow, Ian	Adrian Reynolds	2009	*Harry and the Dinosaurs have a Happy Birthday*	Penguin Random House	UK
42	Willis, Jeanne	Ross, Tony	2010	*Flabby Cat and Slobby Dog**	Andersen	UK

* Starred books were chosen for the more in depth MMDA

Appendix 2

School Information Letter

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES
AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
TE KURA PŪKENGA TANGATA

Healthy Bodies

Research Project

Information & Letter of Invitation

Kia ora,

I'm a PhD Student in the School of Psychology at Massey University here in Palmerston North, and am researching children's ideas around wellbeing and healthy bodies. This letter is to invite your School to be part of the research, and to explain what this would involve. I know your time is precious, so thanks for sparing some time to read and talk to me about my research. To keep this letter short I have only included key information for you, but if you are interested, please read the attached 'additional information' document for a more detailed description of the background and processes of the research.

Overview of the research

I am interested in the complex messages children are receiving about healthy bodies, and how they are making sense of these messages. In particular, I use picture books as a springboard for exploring how we might promote well-being, healthy eating and movement in ways that encourage critical thinking, self-esteem and are (body) positive.

Following an analysis of a selection of picture books being read by children locally, I plan to conduct discussion groups with local children. This letter is an invite for your school to be part of this second stage of the research, which would involve me interviewing small groups of students from a Year 1 or 2 classroom (6-7 year olds). These discussion groups would involve reading some picture books together, talking about them, and also doing some art/ craft where children can create their own drawings or stories to explore ideas around wellbeing and healthy bodies. I envisage that these sessions would last approximately 40 minutes, and would be conducted within the school at a time and place convenient for the school, classroom teacher and students.

Discussion groups will be video-recorded so I can transcribe what the children say and see the children's activities/drawings as they describe things to me. Only I and my supervisors will see the videos, and all identifying information such as names and places (including the school) will be anonymised in the transcript and all reproductions of the data, by using pseudonyms.

Te Kunenga ki Pūrehuroa

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PO Box 756, Wellington 6140, New Zealand T +64 4 801 5799 F +64 4 801 2796 www.massey.ac.nz

I will also be donating a set of books to the school library, and a game or resource to the classroom, as well as a magnet or sticker set to each child, as a small koha of thanks for participating.

What would be involved for the school:

- Providing a space where I could work with small groups of students at a time (such as in the library or a resource room)

What would be involved for teachers:

- Working with me to introduce the research to students and send home and collect information and consent forms from parents
- Helping me to form the students into small groups (2-3) in which they might feel comfortable for the research discussions (e.g. with friends)
- Organising times during school hours suitable for small groups to be involved in the research group discussions with me while the rest of the class continues with other activities with the classroom teacher
- If possible, I'd love to come along to the classroom before starting the project to meet and get to know the teacher and class (perhaps sitting in on an activity, or bringing along some food for a shared afternoon tea, whatever is most convenient for the teacher and appropriate under school policies)

I am very keen to receive any feedback on how best I might minimise these strains on teachers' time and schedules, and can be very flexible about what days and times discussion groups are to be conducted. I am also keen to work with school and/or community contacts to make sure my research is as culturally appropriate as possible, and would love to hear from you if you have any queries or comments concerning this.

If you have any questions at all, or would like to talk about this research project further, then please feel free to contact me or my supervisors through any of the means below. Thanks again for your time,

Warm regards,

Ria Pugmire

Project contacts

Researcher:

Ria Pugmire
ria@netmail.co.nz
021 071 5383

Supervisors:

Professor Antonia Lyons
School of Psychology
Massey University, Wellington
a.lyons@massey.ac.nz
(04) 8015799 extn: 62164

Professor Christine Stephens
School of Psychology
Massey University, PN
c.v.stephens@massey.ac.nz
(06) 356 9099 extn: 85059

A/Prof Lisette Burrows
School of Physical Education, Sport & Exercise Sciences
Otago University
lisette.burrows@otago.ac.nz

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application 15/27. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Prof Julie Boddy, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 06 350 5799 x 86055, email humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz

Appendix 3

Parental Information Sheet

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES
AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
TE KURA PŪKENGA TANGATA

Invitation to participate

in a research project exploring children's ideas about

Wellbeing and Healthy Bodies

My name is **Ria Pugmire**. I am a Psychology student working on my PhD at Massey University in Palmerston North. This letter is to invite you and your child to participate in this research, and to explain briefly what this would involve. If you would like more detail, feel free to get in touch with me directly; I have also included an 'additional information' document attached to the back of this letter for if you would like to know more.

Research Focus

I am interested in the messages children are receiving about wellbeing and healthy bodies, and how children see these messages. These messages are about things like: healthy eating, physical activity, body size, body image and diversity.

What's involved?

Once parental consent forms have been returned, I will visit your child's classroom to talk about the project and ask those children with parental permission if they would like to be involved.

Over the following month I will meet with small **groups** of participating children during school hours, at a time convenient to the teacher and students.

I will look at **picture books** with the groups of children, and discuss the ideas about well-being and healthy bodies that they raise. I will ask questions about the content of the books and how the children make sense of it. The children will be invited to draw or write their own ideas about well-being and healthy bodies, taking care of themselves and helping people feel good about themselves, in whatever form they feel like using the materials I will make available (picture, story, picture book, poster, poem, comic, etc).

Discussion groups will be **video-recorded** so I can transcribe what the children say and see the children's activities/drawings as they describe things to me. Only I and my supervisors will see the videos, and all identifying information such as names and places will be anonymised in the transcript and in all reports, by using pseudonyms.

I will also be donating a set of books to the school library, and a game or resource to the classroom, as well as a magnet or sticker set to each child, as a small koha of thanks for participating.

Te Kunenga ki Pūrehuroa

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What will happen to the findings.

- A summary of the findings for you, the School and for the children
- A PhD thesis
- Presentations to interested bodies and publications in international journals

What are your and your child's rights as participants?

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you and your child decide to participate, you have the right to:

- withdraw from the study at any time
- ask any questions about the study at any time
- provide information on the understanding that their/your names will not be used;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.

Similarly, your child has the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the study before, during or at the end of the discussion group
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation,
- provide information on the understanding that their name will not be used;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings (written in an accessible manner) when it is concluded.

Cultural considerations

I am a Pākehā New Zealander, and am aware that my participants are likely to come from a range of cultural backgrounds different from my own. If you have any concerns about the research, or cultural needs you would like me to address in the process of the research, please let me know – there is a dedicated space on the consent form, or you can contact me directly to discuss it through any of the means below. I'd love to hear from you.

Thanks so much for your time!
☺ Ria

Project Contacts

If you have any questions at all, or would like to talk about this research project further, then please feel free to contact me or my supervisors.

Researcher:
Ria Pugmire
ria@netmail.co.nz
021 071 5383

Supervisors:

Professor Antonia Lyons
School of Psychology
Massey University, Wellington
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Professor Christine Stephens
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A/Prof Lisette Burrows
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Otago University
lisette.burrows@otago.ac.nz

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application 15/27. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Prof Julie Boddy, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 06 350 5799 x 86055, email humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz

Appendix 4

Parental Consent Form

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
TE KURA PŪKENGA TANGATA

Healthy Bodies Research

Parental Consent Form

Please tick the box provided if you ***agree*** with the following statements:

☐ I have read the *Information Letter* about the project, and any questions I had have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

☐ I understand there is no obligation to participate, and I can withdraw my child from the study at any time without giving reason and without penalty.

☐ I understand that all my and my child's information will remain confidential to the researcher and research supervisors. All identifying information will be changed or removed by the researcher.

☐ I am the legal guardian of ____________________________________ and I agree for them to be given the opportunity to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the *Information Letter*.

☐ I agree to the interview being video recorded (including image & audio).

Demographic information

Child's age: __________

Ethnicity/cultural identification: ____

Anything else you would like us to know: ____

____

In addition, please let us know any cultural needs you or your child would like met in the process of the research (feel free to contact me to discuss these in more detail):

____

____

____

____

____

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____

____

____

____

Finally, please circle your preferences below:

I **would/would not** like a summary of the main findings from this study **mailed/emailed** to me when they become available (please provide an address below).

Parent/Guardian's full name: ____

Signature: __________________________________ Date: _______________

Address: (if required) ____

____

____

____

____

____

Thank you for your time ☺

Appendix 5

Child Information Sheet

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES
AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
TE KURA PŪKENGA TANGATA

Healthy bodies
Information Letter for Kids

Kia Ora!

My name is **Ria Pugmire**. I am finding out about what children like you think about well-being and healthy bodies.

This letter is to ask if you would like to help, and to tell you what would happen if you do.

If you decide to take part, then:

- Your teacher will help me make up research groups, with you and one or two other kids from your class
- During school sometime, you and the other kids in your research group will sit down with me to discuss healthy bodies, while the rest of the class works on something else
- we will look at some picture books together and talk about them
- I will ask you questions about what you think about different things to do with wellbeing and healthy bodies.
- I will also have some paper and pencils so that you can draw or write some of your own ideas if you would like to
- I will record our conversation with a video camera so I can look back later and see what you were telling me.

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If you take part, you will be able to:

- say you don't want to answer any of the questions that I ask;
- say you want to stop taking part in the discussion, anytime;
- ask me any questions you think of whenever you like;
- Find out what happened with the study and its results when it has finished.

This will help me write a report that will tell people about what children think about well-being and healthy bodies. I won't use your real name when I write my report. That means that no-one will know what you said except me. If there is something you don't understand or are worried about you can talk to me, your teacher or your parents. You can ask me any more questions you think of.

You don't have to help if you don't want to, and it's fine if you change your mind later. You can just tell me you want to stop.

If you think this would be okay, and would like to help, we will fill in the *Letter That Gives Your Permission* together. You get to keep a copy of this *Information Letter* and the *Letter That Gives Your Permission* to help you remember what we talked about.

Thank you for talking to me,

☺ Ria.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application 15/27. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Prof Julie Boddy, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 06 350 5799 x 86055, email humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz

Appendix 6

Child Consent Form

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES
AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
TE KURA PŪKENGA TANGATA

The Letter that Gives Your Permission

Name: ____________________

Did you read through the information letter with Ria? **Yes / No**

Did it make sense? Do you understand what Ria is asking you to do? **Yes / No**

Do you understand that you don't have to be part of the research, and you can stop anytime if you want to? **Yes / No**

Do you understand that Ria won't use your real name in her research? **Yes / No**

Would you like to be part of the research, and to talk to Ria about well-being and healthy bodies? **Yes / No**

Are you happy for Ria to record your discussion with a video camera? **Yes / No**

Are there any more questions you would like to ask at the moment? (You can ask more later if you want to) **Yes / No**

Signature: ________________________________

Date: ________________________________

Witness: ________________________________

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Appendix 7

Transcription notation

[	A: quite a [while B: [yea	Left brackets indicate the point at which a current speaker's talk is overlapped by another's talk.
=	A: what did you = B: = Yes, I thought it was very good.	Equal signs, one at the end of a line and one at the beginning, indicate no gap between the two lines.
(4)	Yes (2) yeah	Numbers in parentheses indicate elapsed time in silence in seconds.
word	I think so	Underscoring indicates some form of stress, via pitch and/or amplitude.
{word}	{laughter}	Any other significant behaviour – laughter, sighing, intake of breath, arm movements etc.
( )	Future risks and ( ) and life ( )	Empty parentheses indicate the transcriber's inability to hear what was said.
(word)	Would you say (that) there was anything positive?	Parenthesized words are possible hearings.
word_	Hmm_	An underscore following a word or syllable indicates an extension or drawn out sound.
word	*Once upon a time....*	Italics indicate sections that were read aloud from books or written material.
word?	You just kind of know?	A question mark indicates an upward pitch at the end of a word or sentence, giving it a questioning sound.

Appendix 8

Image permission requests and responses

To whom it may concern,

I am a PhD candidate at Massey University (New Zealand), exploring themes of bodies and 'healthy living' in picture books, as well as reading books with children and exploring how they interact with and understand them. I am writing to request permission to use quotes and images from a picture book published by your company in _____, titled _____________, as an example to illustrate my arguments in my thesis and in the academic papers that may follow on from it.

I have attached a document with the specific illustrations requested.

Thank you for your time,

Ria Pugmire

PhD Candidate

Massey University

ria@netmail.co.nz

NB: Online request forms were also filled in where these were available from the Publisher's website.

From: Romana Essop <Romana.Essop@walker.co.uk>

Subject: RE: Request for permission to reproduce material for academicanalysis

Date: Tuesday, 19/10/2021 9:28 PM

Dear Ria,

Thank you for getting in touch.

In regards to your PhD thesis, can you confirm that the usage of our material will be limited to your thesis submission in electronic format and up to 10 hard copies only? Provided that these papers are only shared with the academic members of your institution (such as fellow researchers, university tutors or supervisors), then the use of images and quotes from WILLY THE WIMP and A PIECE OF CAKE would classify as personal use, and therefore would not need any formal agreements or contracts from us. We do however recommend that you include some form of credit line which acknowledges the authors of the work, the years of first publication and Walker Books as the original publisher.

Please note that this is subject to your thesis remaining an unpublished work. If you do intend to publish this in the future or share the material further, please get back in touch and we will treat put your request through our usual process. In this case, we would need specific details about the publication (including the publisher, accessibility and price).

Best of luck with your thesis,
Romana Essop
Business Affairs Admin Assistant
Walker Books Ltd
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