NORMAL EATING IS COUNTER-CULTURAL

Exploring Young Women's Lived, Embodied Experience of Eating Disorder Recovery

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Eating disorder recovery: a complex & multifaceted experience

- Physical
- Psychological
- Affective?

What assumptions underlie the term “recovery”?
Eating disorder treatment outcomes:

- Nutrition and/or weight restoration, restoration of “normal eating” (Bardone-Cone et al., 2010; Gremillion, 2003; Rance, Clarke & Moller, 2014)
- “Recovery”?

Recognition that recovery is more than weight restoration- but what comprises “more”? 
Moralized bodies in contemporary Western societies:

- “Healthy-thin” bodies seen as morally, medically, aesthetically desirable (Saguay & Ward, 2011)
- Moral panic & fear around “obesity epidemic”

Bodies under surveillance:

- Bodies are political spaces
- Body management taken up as social affair
Biopedagogies: “assemblages” of information, instructions, directives (Leahy, 2009)

- How to live
- How to be embodied
- What “health” is
- How to be healthy & happy (e.g. Harwood, 2010)
- How to avoid risk (Fullagar, 2009, p. 124)
- How to achieve recovery, wellness (LaMarre, Rice & Bear)
Do these broader societal messages (biopedagogies) impact possibility of achieving or imagining eating disorder recovery?
METHODOLOGY

- Narrative interviews (10) (Riessman, 2007)
- Digital stories (3)

- Participatory, arts-based methods
- Centralizing participants’ voices

- Narrative thematic analysis on both sources of data for common themes & particularities
PARTICIPANTS

- 10 women, 20-31 (average age: 25)
- All university educated
- Diagnoses (not mutually exclusive):
  - 8 anorexia nervosa
  - 3 bulimia nervosa
  - 2 non-diagnosed (1 identified BN, 1 ED-NOS)
- Complicating categories of race, ethnicity, and sexuality
RESULTS

- Biopedagogy of recovery
  - Materiality of Eating Disorders & Recovery
  - Beyond Biometrics
  - Embodying Counter-Culture
  - Authenticity and Invisibility
  - Recovery is an (Embodied) Place
State/label of “recovered”: potentially problematic expectations & standards
- “Overwhelmingness” of full recovery
- Lack of space for vulnerability

Prescriptions for recovery helpful to a certain extent; then may contravene dominant biopedagogies
Recovery biopedagogies may be read as counter-cultural

- Especially post weight-gain, participants encountered ambiguous prescriptions for health
- “Readings” of participants’ bodies & behaviours differed based on others’ knowledge of their histories
IMPLICATIONS

- Working closely with participants:
  - Co-creating art
  - Delving deeply into recovery stories
  - Uncovering complexity

- “Recovery” as potentially alienating
  - Not settling for less; envisioning differently
IMPLICATIONS

- Making space for multiple perspectives on recovery, multiple routes to recovery
- Not assuming all patients will identify with the language of recovery
- Understanding the counter-cultural quality of recovery in a society that moralizes bodies
REFERENCES


