



# Parents, policy and stigma

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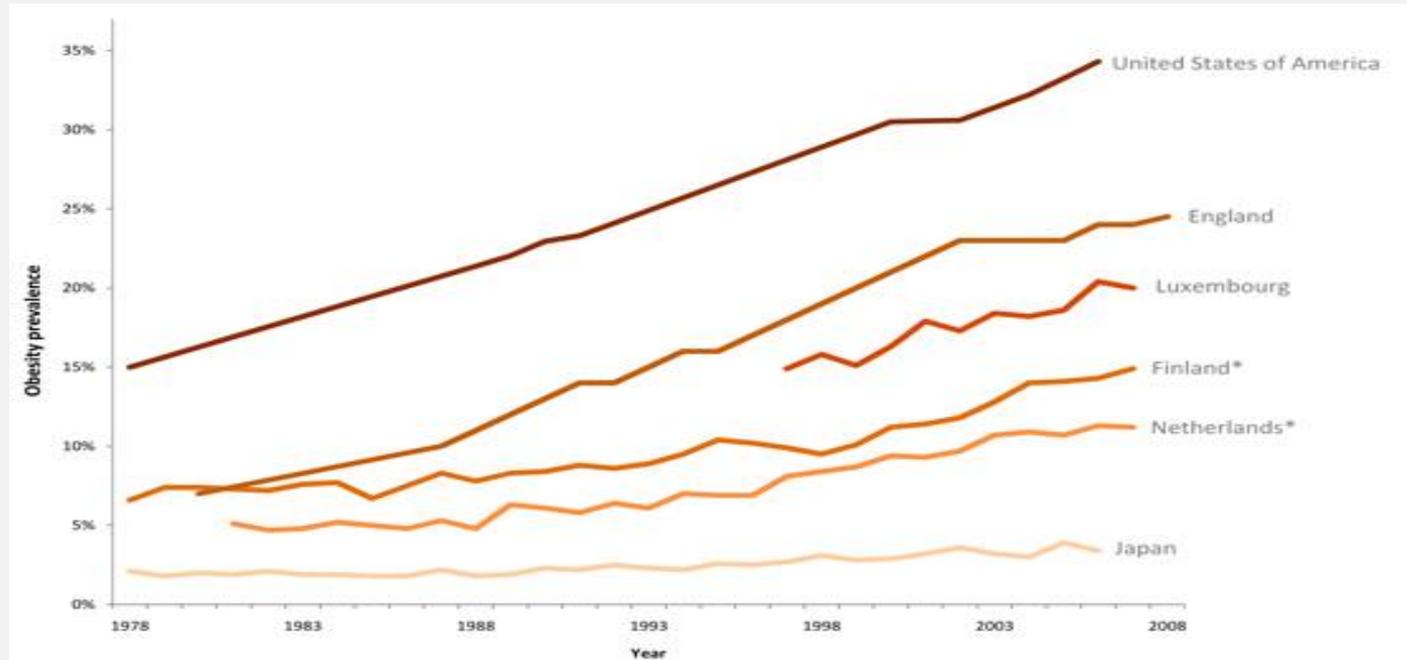
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Child Weight Management

# Overview

- Background
  - Neoliberal era
  - Intractability of obesity problem and social gradient
  - Multiple layered stigmatisation
- Research
  - Disconnects between working class parents of children with obesity and 'policy'
  - Absent voices
- Findings
  - Evidence of multiple stigmas attached to parents of children with obesity
- Conclusion
  - How may impact the effectiveness of those initiatives
  - Way forward

# Child obesity and neoliberalism



<http://www.ecosante.org/index2.php?base=OCDE&langs=ENG&langh=ENG>

	1970s	1990s	2000s
<u>Food system</u>	<u>Rise of neoliberalism</u>	<u>Food &amp; public health policy</u>	<u>Policy cacophony</u>
Mass production	Economic and ideological	Behavioural change	Food/ public health
Cheap calories	Collectivism to individualism	Focus individual not structural	Parental deficit & blame

# Multiple layered stigmatisation

Effects of stigmatisation well documented

Weight:

- Low body esteem
- Suicidal

Poverty:

- Shame
- Isolation



Stigmatising images persists in public health campaigns: London borough 2016

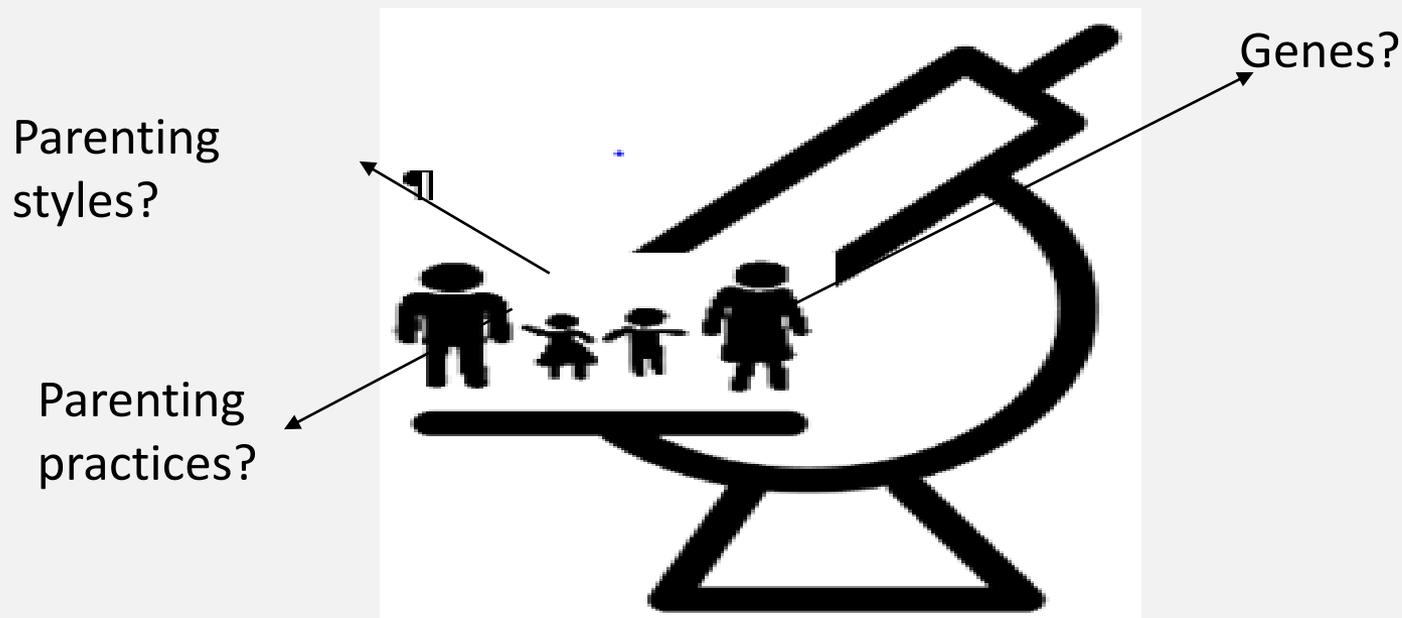


Acanthosis nigricans  
symbolic of potential  
physical and psychosocial  
effects of obesity in children

## Parents and policy – absent voices

‘Study reveals **parents'** poor eating habits **are to blame** for childhood obesity, NOT fast food

Source: [www.dailymail.co.uk](http://www.dailymail.co.uk), 2016

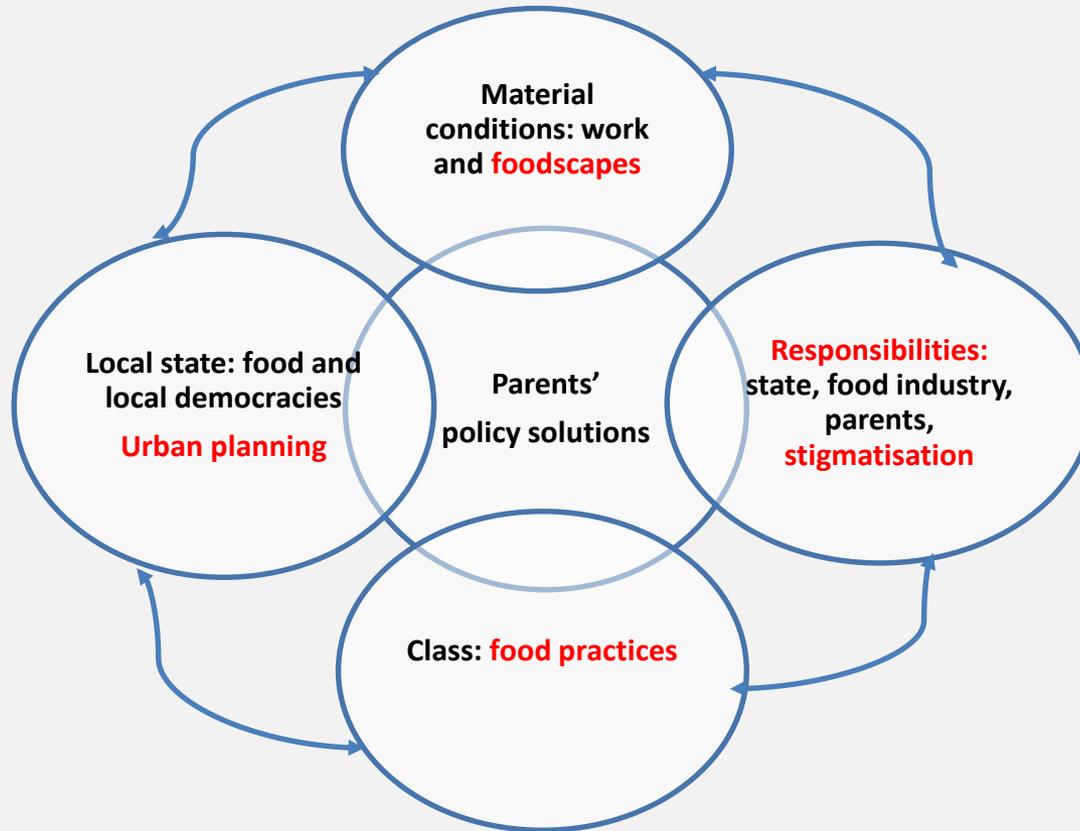


# PhD research

- Qualitative critical policy analysis
- Critical theory paradigm:
  - Foucault - governmentalities
  - Gramsci - hegemony
  - Bourdieu – symbolic violence
- Policy analysis framework
  - Policy triangles (Walt and Gilson 1994; Lang, 2005);
  - What's the Problem Represented to be (Bacchi, 2009)
- Data collection:
  - Policy documents
  - Field work- 35 semi-structured interviews with policy actors including 13 parents
- Interface of local state – a London borough
- Thematic analysis

# Findings: key themes

Simple diagram of  
key themes with  
stigma presence  
coloured red policy



## Strategic deployment of stigmatisation and discrimination

- Not as individual or cultural phenomena
- As social process, layered
- Strategically deployed through policy

*‘ ..understood in the broader notions of power and domination...producing and reproducing relations of power and control...leading some groups to [feel]devalued and others...superior...Ultimately linked to the workings of social inequality...’*

(Aggleton and Parker, 2003, p. 16)

## Policy process - layered stigmatisations

- Multiple interconnected socially embedded stigmatisations (Puhl and Huere, 2008):

Welfare, weight, parenting practices, healthy eating and class:

Lena, on welfare benefits

*They like to stereotype yes, I feel the **government do like to stereotype families**. They like to talk about the **children will have less education**, and the children **will be fatter**, and the children **will be poor**, and the **police will have their records** by time whatever age. And I don't think that's right*

Interviewer

*Who are they talking about?*

Lena

*I think they... they **target parents on benefits**. Once they know you're on a particular benefit that's it they separate you into a little section*

## Layered stigmatisations: foodscapes

### Fast food outlets: What comes first?

Food preference or availability?

Policymakers stated

- 'Chicken and egg'?
- No power to change

Whereas parents suggest discrimination:

Maya, café worker

***they dump*** those kind of things in our area because they see it as deprived and ***they think the people who live there don't matter***



## Shaping food practices of families and children



Leyla, childcare worker

*'...it's keeping the adults on their liquor, the kids on the sweets and then the take-aways for dinner... It's what we're seeing everyday. So all we think about is sweets and drinks...It's like the betting shops. We've got so many betting shops... a lot more people are doing it... it's not good'*

# Foodscapes: symbolic violence

Affluent area:



Felecia (playground supervisor)

*Now that looks pretty. Its looks like something that would be more healthy....it looks like a little health food shop... **it's not life threatening***

Gentrification:

Angela, community policy implementer

***'middle class, these are people who pay for a baguette with a bank card type of thing. It's...as a friend said to me 'I feel uncomfortable in those places as if I don't belong'....And that's what's happening all around.***

## Stigmatisation: effects in communities and families

### Community life: 'othering',

Liz, bus driver mum

*...it's the parents. I think it's the other parents...*

### Work and welfare

Liz, bus driver mum

*'There are **people on benefits** ...who've got a **good quality of life** with their kids because they **are at home and are able to cook**...it's more the working parents that are suffering and the kids of working parents'*

Felecia, on welfare

*Yes I was on benefits...I don't want my children to go to someone for childcare, and then the government helps me pay for it. Why? I don't need them to do that. **I will do my bit and look after my children***

# Public health policy and stigma

## Fear based health messaging:



'Nine out of 10 of our kids today could grow up with dangerous amounts of fat in their bodies. This can cause life-threatening diseases like cancer, type 2 diabetes and heart disease'



Killing your child

*“...that **they showed their love** by giving her more things to eat...**the idea that you might be killing your child...**”*

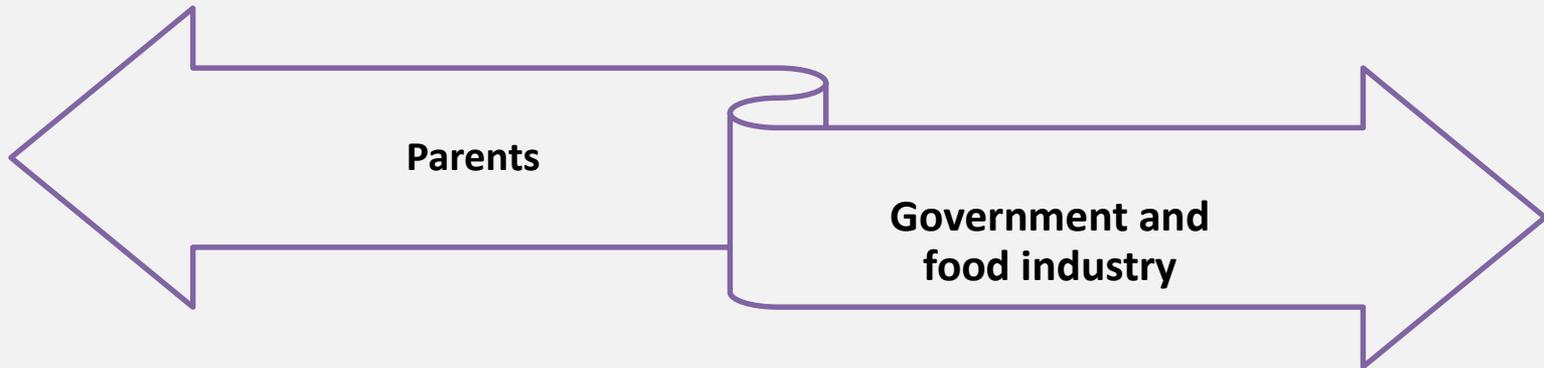
## National child measurement programme (NCMP) and stigma

NCMP and its feedback letter to parents, entered onto 'the stage' of layered stigmatisation:

Leyla, childcare worker:

*'...obviously when you **get the letter** of your child's measurements...you assume it's the **parents fault straight** away. If you heard your child's obese or whatever, **parents are going to talk**, people are going to talk, and assume that **the parents are obese as well**. Or you know, **neglecting** the child, **don't care**, just **feed it to shut it up**'*

## Parents' policy solution: realities of life versus government policy



Despite feeling devalued parents suggested rich, creative policy solutions:

1. Improving material conditions: employment and welfare, redesign foodscapes
2. Greater control of the food companies – regulation, product reformulations, healthful foods
3. Community level participation in food environments, and food-policy making – schools and children centres

## Conclusion

- Layered, socially embedded stigmatisations mediated by policy: foodscapes, Change4life, NCMP
- Parents resist stigma, potential barriers to engagement – collaboration is needed
- Structural factors and multiple stigmatisations reproduce the ‘lived effects’ of the social gradient
- Social division among parents countered by unifying factor: child health
- Political ethic of care, foundational to public policy that supports parents (Williams 2005)

Thank you for listening and any questions?

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Diego Rivera Triumph of the Revolution - Distribution of Food



# References

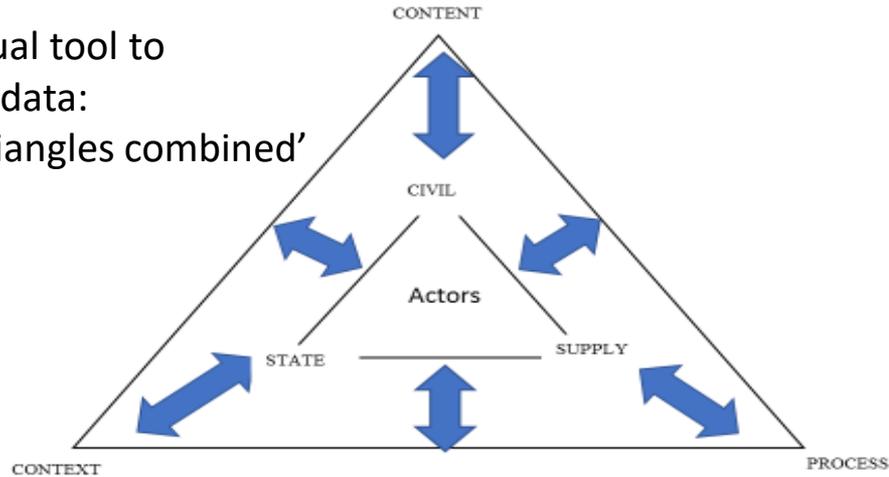
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# Parent Sample

Age	Gender	Ethnic group	Post code	Occup	Edu.	Household type	State bens	Housing tenure	Assigned* social class
23 to 54	13 – F 2 - M	1 Russian/Azerb. 3 Black African 2 Turkish Cypriot 2 White English 1 Black British 1 White/ Black Caribbean 1 Pakistani/Arab 2 Black Caribbean 1 Asian/Caribbn 1 other	All in lowest 2 deciles of MSOA 2 on deciles 5/6	Child - care workers Adult - care workers Bus drivers Admin. Nurse Teacher	13 – second. level  2 -degree level	7 one family lone parent  7 one family couple  1 not say	9 Yes	12 social 3 home owners 1 not say	13 working class  2 middle class

\* Defining social class using Clement, W and Myles, J. 1997

Conceptual tool to  
organise data:  
'Policy triangles combined'



Data organised:

1. 'Policy triangles combined': tool for policy analysis combining Walt and Gilson's (1994) and Lang's (2005) policy triangles. The arrows represent the presence of power in the policy process
1. Data further explored using: '*What the Problem Represented to be*' (Bacchi 2009)