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'Kiwi kids are Weet-Bix™ kids'—body matters in childhood

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Abstract

A wide array of health policies and initiatives have emerged in New Zealand recently in an attempt to resurrect a presumed 'lost', adventure-loving, physically capable and non-obese Kiwi kid. Chief among these is Mission-On—a 67 million dollar package of 10 initiatives designed to explicitly target the eating and exercise dispositions of young people. I suggest that Mission-On, together with the raft of other avowedly health-promoting resources being directed at young people, provides an exemplary case of body pedagogies at play both via its far-ranging formally enunciated objectives and due to its annexing of these to popular cultures, familial obligations and educational missives. The aim of this paper, therefore, is to examine how pedagogies, like those regularly deployed under the Mission-On rubric, are made sense of by young children. The key habits and dispositions children believe are needed to achieve a healthy 'self' are highlighted, together with some of the ways in which young people come to assess

the veracity of health knowledge. Analysis of interviews with New Zealand primary school students suggests that children engage with, enact and disrupt health imperatives in multiple ways, often linked to their differing social and spatial locations in home, school and community contexts. While their testimony points to small fissures in the Mission-On armoury, it is suggested that in a climate so thoroughly saturated with messages around healthy eating and exercise, it remains challenging for children to imagine themselves as the adventurous, confident, fun-loving ‘kiwi kids’ government desires to ‘bring back’.

Keywords:

- Health
- Obesity
- Children
- Body pedagogies

Notes

1. Pseudonyms for both schools mentioned and children who were interviewed are used throughout.

Related Research Data

Teaching Bodies: Affects in the Classroom

Source: Body & Society

Being Fit and Looking Healthy: Young Women’s and Men’s Constructions of Health and Fitness

Source: Sex Roles

Who Wants to Marry a Millionaire? Reality Dating Television Programs, Attitudes Toward Sex, and Sexual Behaviors

Source: Sex Roles

Discourse analysis: a new methodology for understanding the ideologies of health and illness

Source: Australian Journal of Public Health

Health care costs of obesity in New Zealand

Source: International Journal of Obesity

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