Weight Bias: Changing Public Perception Begins with Me

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Overview

- What is weight bias?
- Why does it matter?
- How can I change things?
What Is Weight Bias?

- Negative attitudes toward individuals with obesity
- Stereotypes leading to:
  - Stigma
  - Rejection
  - Prejudice
  - Discrimination
- Verbal, physical, relational, cyber
- Subtle and overt
Weight Bias Invades Every Corner of Life

Substantial Evidence of Bias in:
- Media
- Employment
- Education
- Healthcare
- Interpersonal Relationships
- Youth

Weight Discrimination Is Common

Rates of Reported Discrimination Among Adults Ages 25-74 (N = 2290)

Error bars indicate 95% confidence intervals.
Weight Discrimination Is Growing

Trends in rates of reported discrimination Among Adults Ages 25-74 (N = 2962)

Error bars indicate 95% confidence intervals. Puhl, Andreyeva, Brownell (2008).
Weight Bias in Mass Media
Weight Bias in The Media

• Stereotypical portrayals
• Abundant but often ignored
• Reinforces social acceptability of bias
• Affects public perceptions about obesity
“Fattertainment”

WHALE WATCHING
WHAT’S SO FUNNY ABOUT FAT PEOPLE GETTING HIT IN THE GROIN WITH FOOTBALLS? EVERYTHING.

IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, SHME THE LEAST FAT PEOPLE ON EARTH, IT’S FINALLY COME TO THIS. WE HAVE DEVELOPED AN INTRINSIC APPETITE NOT ONLY FOR MONUMENTAL CUPCAKES BUT FOR FATNESS ITSELF. TUNE IN THE TV AND IT’S EVERYWHERE. ON NBC’S GอมINING THE BIGGEST LOSER, WHERE THE SEDULOUSLY SLIM CERTAINLY TRY TO DISTRACT THEIR WAY INTO SLIMMER JOURS. ON WH’S CELEBRITY FIT CLUB, WITH THE RELIC OF PUMP-ROARING CHLORINES. ON DIY’S DEGRASSI’S SENSITIVE AREA, IN WHICH THE SHAKING OF IPHILLIPPSIAN BEERS...
TV/Film Portrayals of Obesity

- Few characters with obesity on television
- Characters with obesity in stereotypical roles
  - Unattractive
  - Unintelligent
  - Unhappy
  - Aggressive
  - Evil
  - Eating junk food
  - Unfriendly
  - Cruel
  - Having no friends
  - Unpopular
- Fewer positive social interactions, romantic relationships

Ata & Thompson, 2010; Greenberg et al., 2003; Harrison, 2000; Himes & Thompson, 2007; Klein & Shiffman, 2005; 2006; Latner et al., 2007; Robinson et al., 2008.
Research Shows Media Add to Weight Bias

Weight bias increases with exposure to:

- Television
- Films
- Fashion magazines
- Video games

Harrison, 2000; Latner et al., 2007; Lin & Reid, 2009.
News Media

• Power to shape public perceptions of health/social issues

• 40-61 percent of adults access news online

• "Seeing pictures and videos, rather than reading or hearing the facts, gives the best understanding of news events"

News Media Images Are Powerful
Online News Presents Biased Obesity Images

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative characteristics</th>
<th>Overweight/ Obese (N= 287)</th>
<th>Non-overweight (N = 119)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Headless&quot;</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>6%**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shown from side or rear angle</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>20%**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only abdomen or lower body shown</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>0%**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shown without clothes or bare midriff</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>4%*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inappropriate fitting clothing</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0%**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shown eating and/or drinking</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged in sedentary activity</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Positive characteristics</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wearing professional clothing</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>50%**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shown exercising</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>20%**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portrayed as expert or advocate</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>33%**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portrayed as health care provider</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>22%**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p<0.05; **p<0.001. Heuer, McClure, and Puhl (in press, J Health Communication).
Biased Images Promote Prejudice

• Findings
  - 72 percent of images stigmatized individuals with obesity
  - 65 percent of videos stigmatized adults with obesity

• Experimental studies
  - Stigmatizing images worsen public attitudes
  - Non-stigmatizing images improve attitudes
  - Public prefers non-stigmatizing images

Media Slant on Chris Christie

How to Turn Chris Christie's Weight into an 'Issue'

American Way: Chris Christie, the fat guy who won't get the girl in 2012

Is Chris Christie Too Fat To Squeeze Into The Oval Office?
Weight Bias in the Workplace
What Does The Science Say?

Inequitable hiring practices
Prejudice from employers
Lower wages
Disciplinary action
Wrongful job termination
Discriminatory Hiring Practices

Job candidates with obesity are:

– Less likely to be hired
– Ascribed more negative attributes
– Perceived as poor fit for position
– Assigned lower starting salary
– Evaluated less favorably, even when compared to thin applicants who were unqualified

Finkelstein, Frautschy Demuth, Sweeney (2007); Kutcher & DeNicolis Bragger (2004); Sartore & Cunningham. (2007).
Reports of Workplace Discrimination

• 2,449 Women with overweight/obesity:
  – Weight Prejudice from Employers: **43%**
  – Weight Prejudice from Co-workers: **54%**

Weight Bias in Healthcare
Weight Bias

Documented Healthcare Professionals

- Physicians
- Nurses
- Medical Students
- Psychologists
- Dietitians
- Fitness Professionals

Providers Harbor False Assumptions about Patients with Obesity

- Non-compliant
- Lazy
- Lack self-control
- Awkward
- Weak-willed

- Sloppy
- Unsuccessful
- Unintelligent
- Dishonest

Ferrante et al., 2009; Campbell et al., 2000; Fogelman et al., 2002; Foster, 2003; Hebl & Xu, 2001; Price et al., 1987; Puhl & Heuer, 2009; Huizinga et al., 2010.
Physicians

• View Patients with Obesity as...
  • Less self-disciplined
  • Less compliant
  • More annoying

• As patient BMI increases, physicians report:
  • Having less patience
  • Less desire to help the patient
  • Seeing patients with obesity was a waste of their time
  • Having less respect for patients

Hebl & Xu, 2001; Huizinga et al., 2009.
Nurses

- View patients with obesity as:
  - Lazy
  - Lacking in self-control/willpower
  - Non-compliant

- In one study...
  - 31% “would prefer not to care for obese patients”
  - 24% agreed that obese patients “repulsed them”
  - 12% “would prefer not to touch obese patients”

Poon & Tarrant, 2009; Brown, 2006; Bagley, 1989; Hoppe & Ogden, 1997; Maroney & Golub, 1992.
Weight Bias in Education
Students with Obesity Face

• Harassment and bullying
  – From other students
  – From teachers

• False and low expectations from teachers

• Barriers to opportunities
Weight Bias Persists in Universities

- Candidates for undergraduate admission
  - Identical but for weight status
  - Candidates with obesity judged less qualified

- Study of graduate psychology programs
  - Interviews favored thinner candidates
  - Regardless of qualifications
The Case of Dr. Geoffrey Miller

• Psychology professor who tweeted:
  
  Dear obese PhD applicants: If you don’t have the willpower to stop eating carbs, you won’t have the willpower to do a dissertation. #truth.

• Disciplined for breaches of ethics

• Banned from admissions committees
Why Does Weight Bias Matter?
Weight Bias Matters Because

- It’s no different from any other bigotry
- Violation of human dignity
- Dehumanizing people
- Waste of human potential
- Barrier to overcoming obesity
Weight Bias Has Far-reaching Effects

- Keeping people with obesity from seeking help
- Keeping professionals from offering help
- The last socially acceptable form of discrimination
- Making obesity initiatives ineffective
- Erecting barriers to treatment access

Recognizing and combating bias, both your own and from others, is critical to defeating obesity
Obesity Wage Penalties

• 12,686 people followed throughout 15 years to examine wage effects of obesity:

  – Women’s Wages:  
    6.1% lower with obesity

  – Men’s Wages:  
    3.4% lower with obesity

Weight Bias Makes Health Worse

Provider interacting with those affected:

- Spend less time in appointments
- Discuss less with patients
- Offer less empathy
- Assign more negative symptoms
- Perform certain screenings less
- Offer less treatment

Bacquier et al., 2005; Bertakis & Azari, 2005; Campbell et al., 2000; Galuska et al., 1999; Hebl & Xu, 2001; Kristeller & Hoerr, 1997; Price et al., 1987
Impact on Care

Patients with obesity less often get:

- Preventive health services & exams
- Cancer screens, pelvic exams, mammograms

And more often:

- Cancel appointments
- Delay appointments and preventive care

Adams et al., 1993; Drury & Louis, 2002; Fontaine et al., 1998; Olson et al., 1994, Ostbye et al., 2005; Wee et al., 2000; Aldrich & Hackley, 2010.
From a New York Times Reader:

“You could walk in with an ax sticking out of your head and they would tell you your head hurt because you’re fat.”
Weight Bias Makes the Obesity Worse

- Obesity
- Health Impact
- Health Care
- Healthcare Avoidance
- Unhealthy Behaviors
- Weight Bias

Source: Yale Rudd Center
Using Shame and Blame Against Obesity Is a Lie

- Some rationalize weight bias and stigma as a source of motivation for healthy weight.
- Research shows weight discrimination doubles the risk of developing obesity.
- And triples the risk of persistent obesity.
- Encouragement, not blame, is needed.
Defeating Obesity and Weight Bias

Change Begins with Me
Rise to the Challenge of Weight Bias

- Reject labels
- Put people first
- Respect others, love yourself
- Reject negative agendas
- Promote a positive agenda of health
Reject Labels

- Labels put people in a box

- “I know what kind of person you are”

- “Obese” is a label to reject

- Obesity is a disease, not an identity
Obesity Is a Disease, not a Choice

Research shows

• People reject bias when they understand the external causes of obesity

• People express bias when they perceive it as a choice
People-First Language Is a Measure of Respect

- People who label others “obese” harbor more weight bias
- Shift the conversation from “being obese”
- Toward “obesity” as the foe
Respect Others, Love Yourself

• Surround yourself with supportive friends and loved ones
• Let go of mistakes and blame
• Respect people with issues
• Without getting sucked into their agenda
Join with the OAC to Defeat Bias

• Follow Bias Busters
• Identify stupid, disrespectful weight bias
• Put forward a positive message
• Work toward a future when
  – We’re defeating obesity
  – And empowering the people affected
Rise to the Challenge!