

Impact of the Media on People with Obesity

Joe Nadglowski, President/CEO
Obesity Action Coalition
@JNadglowskiOAC



Special Thanks to Rebecca Puhl, PhD and the UCON Rudd Center for the data slides used in this presentation.

Disclosures

I am an employee of the Obesity Action Coalition. I have no personal industry relationships, but OAC does accept funding from a wide variety of industry partners. No part of my talk today is product-related.

About OAC

- The Obesity Action Coalition is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization dedicated to educating and advocating for individuals affected by the disease of obesity. We currently have more than 59,000 US members.
- **MISSION STATEMENT:**
To elevate and empower those affected by obesity through education, advocacy and support.
- The OAC was created in 2005 after a legislator stood up at a Women in Government meeting on obesity and pointed out the need for a group that represented those who struggle with obesity.

OAC Core Values

- Individuals affected by obesity should be treated with the same level of compassion, dignity and respect as those with other serious medical conditions.
- When ready to address their obesity, individuals should have access to and insurance coverage of evidence-based medical treatments without undue limitations on access or excessive copays.
- No one should be stigmatized and/or discriminated against because of their weight or their failure to seek treatment.

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Obese woman lifted back home by crane

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14:38 Fognini knocked out by Nadal in Rome

14:30 'Marked' petrol price hikes coming up (3)

NEWS > NATION WORLD NEWS

Forklift aids obese man's outing



Media Shapes the Views of Obesity

- Oversimplification of the problem – “Just remove this one thing from your diet and obesity will magically disappear.”
- Promise of cures (not representing the chronic multifactorial view of obesity)
- Furthering stigma around obesity by showing people with obesity in a negative light.
- Dehumanizing obesity through making obesity a statistic and not about real people.
- Promoting diets and/or treatment that aren't evidence-based in the rush to talk about what is new.

Education – Media at Times is an Ally



REUTERS

EDITION: U.S.

Insight: America's hatred of fat hurts obesity fight

Los Angeles Times | SCIENCE

Some anti-obesity campaigns may backfire, researchers say

the Atlantic

Obesity Campaigns: The Fine Line Between Educating and Shaming

Visual Portrayals of People with Obesity in Online News Reports

| | Overweight/obese (N = 287) | Non-overweight (N = 119) |
|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <i>Negative characteristic</i> | | |
| "Headless" | 59% | 6%** |
| Shown from side or rear angle | 40% | 20%** |
| Only abdomen or lower body shown | 52% | 0%** |
| Shown without clothes or bare midriff | 12% | 4%* |
| Inappropriate fitting clothing | 6% | 0%** |
| Shown eating and/or drinking | 8% | 3% |
| Engaged in sedentary activity | 5% | 3% |
| <i>Positive Characteristic</i> | | |
| Wearing professional clothing | 11% | 50%** |
| Shown exercising | 6% | 20%** |
| Portrayed as expert or advocate | 1% | 33%** |
| Portrayed as health care provider | 4% | 22%** |

* p < .05 **p < .001

Visual Portrayals of People with Obesity in Online News Reports

| Video Portrayals | Overweight/Obese Adults | Non-Overweight Adults | z | p |
|---|-------------------------|-----------------------|--------|------|
| <i>Negative characteristics</i> | | | | |
| headless | 47% | 4% | 12.74 | 0.00 |
| unflattering portrayal from the rear view | 40% | 6% | 10.49 | 0.00 |
| eating and drinking | 32% | 13% | 5.53 | 0.00 |
| eating unhealthy food | 32% | 16% | 4.66 | 0.00 |
| unflattering emphasis on isolated body parts | 24% | 9% | 5.10 | 0.00 |
| engaging in sedentary behavior | 16% | 4% | 5.16 | 0.00 |
| showing bare abdomen | 4% | 4% | -0.12 | 0.91 |
| dressed in inappropriately fitting clothing | 4% | 1% | 2.41 | 0.02 |
| <i>Positive (non-stereotypical) characteristics</i> | | | | |
| dressed in professional apparel | 58% | 93% | -10.34 | 0.00 |
| eating healthy food | 14% | 13% | 0.17 | 0.87 |
| engaging in exercise | 17% | 15% | 0.70 | 0.48 |
| health professional | 16% | 43% | -7.10 | 0.00 |
| journalist/reporter | 14% | 77% | -15.25 | 0.00 |
| topic expert/advocate | 10% | 35% | -7.01 | 0.00 |

Findings

- 72% of images stigmatized individuals with obesity
- 65% of videos stigmatized adults with obesity

Experimental studies

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

Room for Improvement

- Appropriate imagery
- Appropriate language
- Educate peers and follow guidelines
- Recognize the difference between reporting on the disease of obesity and someone affected by it.
- Complexity of Obesity – if it was simple, we would have already solved it!

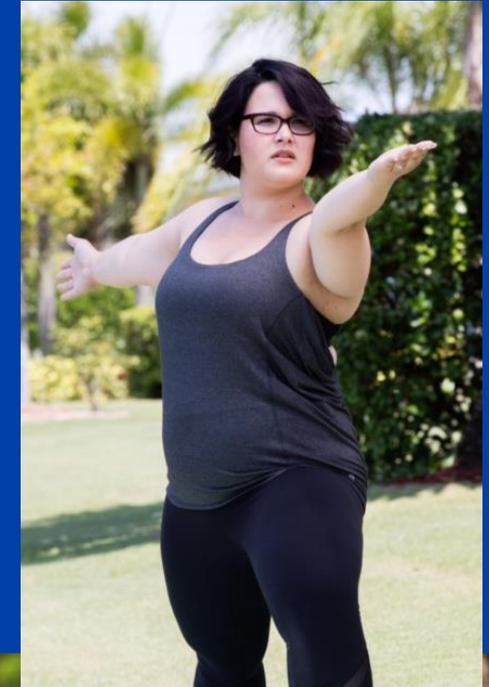
Appropriate Imagery Does Exist!

OAC Offers FREE Access to its Image Gallery for media and non-commercial use!

Choose from 500 images positively portraying people with obesity.

www.obesityaction.org/oac-image-gallery

Additional Galleries are available from the Rudd Center, Canadian Obesity Network and the World Obesity Federation.



Adopt People-First Language

Recommendation:

Adopt People-First Language for all projects/presentations related to obesity and require any future related research to include such language. Simply put, eliminate the use of the word “obese” and replace with:

“Individuals with obesity”

or

“Patient with obesity”

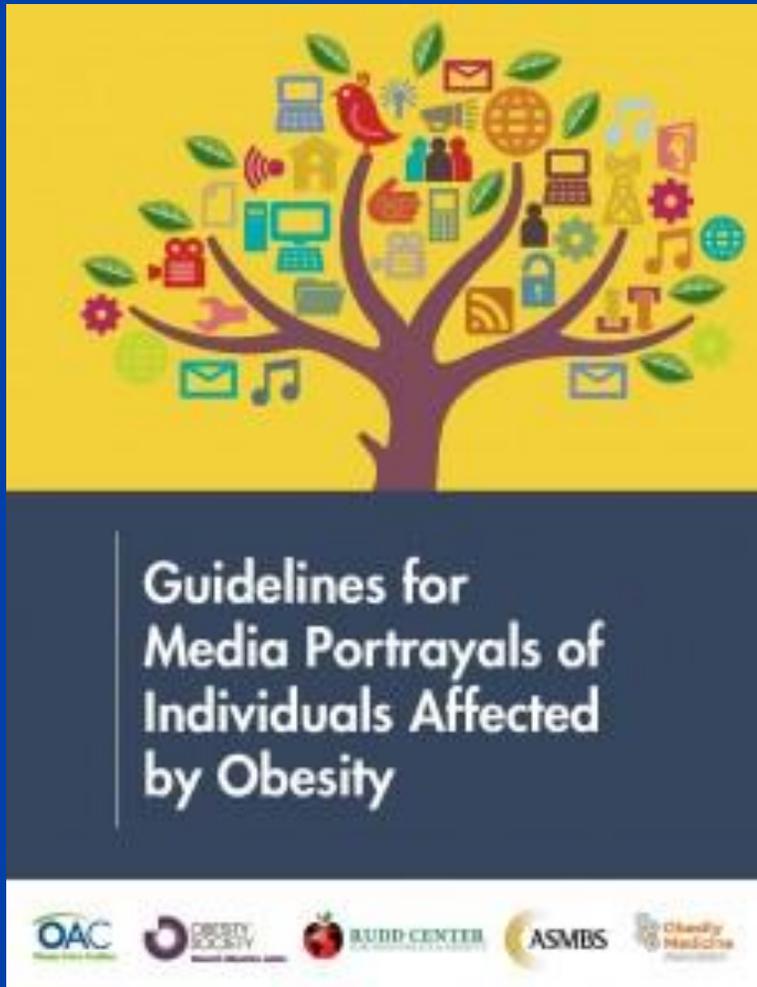
Using People-First Language for obesity was officially adopted by AMA in 2017.

Adopt People-First Language

“Obese is an identity. Obesity is a disease. By addressing the disease separately from the person – and doing so consistently – we can pursue this disease while fully respecting the people affected.”

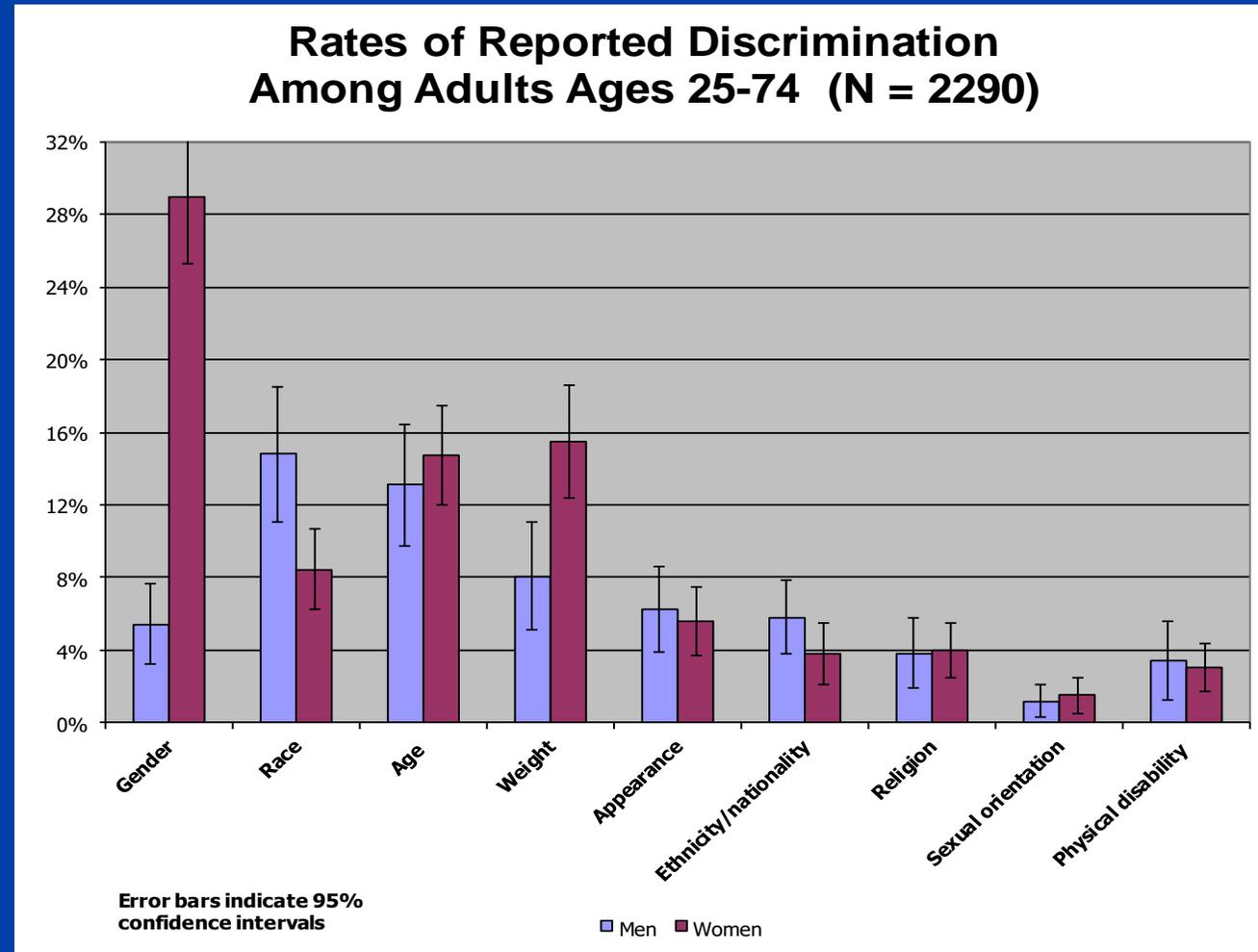
Ted Kyle, RPh, MBA; and Rebecca Puhl, PhD

Follow Guidelines



- Developed by the U.S.-based obesity organizations
- www.obesityaction.org/weight-bias-and-stigma/media-guidelines-for-obesity

Weight-based Discrimination



[Puhl et al, Perceptions of weight discrimination: prevalence and comparison to race and gender discrimination in America. Int J Obes \(Lond\). 2008 Jun;32\(6\):992-1000. doi: 10.1038/ijo.2008.22. Epub 2008 Mar 4.](#)

Gender Differences

| | Overweight | Obesity | Severe Obesity |
|-------|------------|---------|----------------|
| Men | 3% | 6% | 28% |
| Women | 9% | 20% | 45% |

Women are more vulnerable to weight discrimination.

Conclusions

- Media should be an ally in the fight against the disease of obesity and helping those living with it. With some notable exceptions, so far, media is often a barrier.
- Fact-based reporting is essential. Dig beyond the headlines of data releases, etc. to share the real value in new research, products, services, etc.