Milestone Two: A Critical Analyses Through the Lenses of History and Humanities

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Obesity Through the History Lens

For clinicians to come up with a diagnosis, they have to start with doing a history check on their patient. Before the healthcare industry arrived at the diagnosis that the world is suffering from an obesity pandemic, they had to dig up historical evidence. Obesity is considered as a disease that has spread throughout the world. Back in the 1960s and 1970s, 13% of adults in America were considered obese (Johnson, 2012). In 2017-2018, 73.6% of adults in the United States were considered overweight or obese (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). How has this disease spread over time and how has it impacted society?

Through the ages, obesity has both been detested and revered by people. Research says that the history of obesity could have started about 30,000 years back, and small figurines of obese women were the evidence. These little statues were copies of the “Venus of Willendorf,” who is a faceless woman who had a voluptuous body, large thighs, big breasts, a round abdomen, and a rather enlarged vulva. Some say that this could have been a fertility symbol, or a totem of desirability or beauty. This could have been a depiction of the status of women who existed during that time. There are similar things that have been found during that era. But then, it was found in early Christian writings and the Talmud that obesity was not good. The Western biblical philosophy has then influenced people to think that being obese is immoral, shameful, and undesirable (Buchwald, 2018).

In the 20th century, being on the heavier side was a common sign of being successful or affluent. While others could not afford to have enough food, affluent families could buy whatever they wanted. During that time, however, obesity was not the primary focus of the medical community, and comorbidities of obesity were not considered related to it. People who were overweight were already subjected to bullying during that time (Buchwald, 2018). To add to that, it seems that obesity spread when people started becoming more inactive. The first known acceleration was after World War I among white people, when automobiles and radios appeared. In the 1950s, both whites and blacks also succumbed to becoming overweight when television viewing became more widespread and fast food became popular, from the likes of White Castle, McDonald’s, Burger King, and Kentucky Fried Chicken to name a few. Another factor as to why people became more idle include the introduction of technological changes that were labor-saving (Komlos and Brabec, 2010).

To date, there are countless diets and programs trying to counteract the epidemic. Antipathy towards overweight people by Americans is not new. It is seen as aesthetically, culturally, and morally wrong. Over the last few decades, people’s concern made a big shift from self-control to focusing on health (Greenhalgh, 2015, p. 5). Komlos and Brabec (2010) urge the people and the authorities to change the current standards that the United States is using to identify who is overweight or not. They argue that many children and youth are being misled to think that they belong to a normal weight category when they do not.

Obesity Through the Humanities Lens

Obese people are usually looked down upon by others. Shows such as “The Biggest Loser” give a glimpse regarding the struggle that people who are obese go through to lose weight, as well as the stigma that goes along with being overweight. Obese people are oftentimes stereotyped, and this is damaging to their health, human rights, dignity, and even their quality of life (Bombak, 2014). However, analyzing obesity through the lens of humanities can help people to understand why society is acting this way, as well as why certain groups of people have a higher risk of becoming obese. The biases that arise due to weight could be attributed to the popular thinking that obesity is caused by lifestyle choices made by the individual. However, these popular opinions may not exactly reflect the individual experiences of people who are obese, as well as their perspectives on quality of life and health. Obesity is a medical condition that is complex, and is influenced by genetic, social, and environmental factors (University of Liverpool, 2019).

Fat people are consistently stigmatized and discriminated against in three essential areas: education, employment, and healthcare. A study found out the following from the data they gathered: 28% of teachers said that the worst thing that could ever happen to an individual is to become obese; almost a quarter of nurses said that they felt repulsed by people who are obese; and parents who were very strict when it comes to grades and controlling income, less support for college is given to their overweight children compared to those who were thin. Some even suggest that discrimination against obese people occur during jury selection, housing, adoption proceedings, etc., but supporting evidence is lacking (Puhl and Brownell, 2012). In media, obese people are also subject to ridicule as evidenced by derogatory portrayals as well as fat jokes.

The healthcare industry also plays a big role in how society looks at obese people. In the healthcare industry, they are also looked upon as noncompliant, unattractive, and ugly. Some physicians even thought of them as lazy and weak-willed as they viewed obesity as primarily a behavioral problem that is exacerbated by overeating and poor physical activity (Puhl and Heuer, 2012). Now with the pandemic, it has been shown that obesity is a big risk factor for having poor health outcomes when one gets infected with COVID-19. This further puts blame on obese people for choosing to stay that way (Prologo, 2020).

“Normal” people have failed to see that obese people are humans, too. They should not be subjected to ridicule as there are other underlying factors as to why they are obese: some have medical conditions and a lot more. Fat-shaming certainly does not work as it further makes them feel bad about themselves. A new approach should be adapted that is focused on respect and dignity.

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