Obesity in The Media

The Responsibility and The Framing

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Abstract

Situated within the theory of media framing by Robert Entman (1993), this paper examines dominant and alternative framing of women's body shape in the media and media responsibility towards it. Obesity is presented in the media as a disease that has become epidemic, posing a lot of health risks. Statistics of obesity prevalence and relevant medical reports in the media will be introduced first, following the World Health Organization's international and European regions 2016 report. Then, a case study, Cosmopolitan October issue cover page featuring a plus-size model Tess Holliday, is presented to illustrate how entertainment media frame obese women nowadays. In conclusion, a call for media to change its aesthetic frames to healthier, more diverse frames are offered. His paper analyzes Obesity in the Media. It examines Media Framing by Robert Entman (1993), linking it to the Framing of women's body shape in the media and the responsibility taken towards it. Obesity is a disease that has become epidemic and it has a lot of health risk factors. Statistics of obesity prevalence, and medical reports will be discussed in this paper following the World Health Organization international and European regions 2016 report. A case study, Cosmopolitan October cover page issue featuring Tess Holliday, is presented to show how media is framing obesity nowadays. In the end a call for Media to change its artistic frame to a healthier one is offered.

Obesity in The Media

Obesity is a severe disease like any other clinical disease that is spreading around the world. It has become epidemic. A body can be diagnosed by obesity easily. Researchers had estimated the percentage of people diagnosed with this disease, and the mediation took over. But as Media has a big advantage in influencing its audience by the frame they are selecting, is it taking responsibility in the treatment of this issue or is it only mirroring the cases?

Literature Review

 The World Health Organization (WHO), along with many other organizations, has defined obesity and linked it to abnormal fat intake. "Overweight and obesity are defined as abnormal or excessive fat accumulation that presents a risk to health." (Obesity,2018). The American Medical Association (AMA) had designated obesity as a disease in 2013. A very easy and accessible way to measure obesity is through body mass index (BMI). It is the person's weight in kilograms divided by the person's height squared. Though sometimes it doesn't work for certain populations such as athletics. According to The National Health Service (NHS) the BMI cutoffs are the following; 18.5 to 24.9 refers to healthy weight, 25 to 29.9 to overweight, 30 to 39.9 to obesity, and 40 and above to severe obese (Obesity Overview, 2016). The most common risk factors to develop obesity are: Increased energy intake (calories) and sedentary lifestyle (very low activities). Genetics and hormones also contributes to the pathogenesis of obesity. WHO had measured approximately the percentage of the overweight population in the European region and around the world. According to WHO, the percentage of the overweight in Europe region had increased from 55.9% in 2010 till 58.7% in 2016, and the obese from 20.8% to 23.3% which shows obesity is really taking over and increasing in numbers throughout the years. Internationally, the prevalence of overweight among adults from 1975-2016 for both sexes has been ascending throughout the years. To illustrate that, WHO statistics show that, across the

Arab world and in the United States of America (USA), numbers are almost higher than 60% diagnosed with obesity. The more the prevalence of obesity is ascending in the world the more the topic is being featured in the media. For decades, we come to realize that the media in its diverse forms is critical not only to how we learn about countless social problems, but also to the formation of these problems. "Indeed, this attention to obesity in the US media shows no sign of slowing down and in recent years it has been expanded to other parts of the globe" (Boero 2007; Holmes 2009). Robert M. Entman of Northwestern University defined the term "framing" well when he stated: "To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (Entman, 1993). The Media producers selects the topic they want to cover subjectively by focusing on the aspects they choose to promote. The frame will be here introduced by them the way they want the audience to perceive and comprehend.

<div align="center">The Faming and The Responsibly</div>

Media framing, and subjectively approaching a topic is leading to different treatments on the obesity topic. How is Media framing Obesity, is it taking responsibility for the action, or is it only mirroring the cases? As we look into events in the world, and we read or see or hear the news about it, we discover that different media platforms give us different news for the same event. This mostly happens at wars or protests when according to the media station for example the subjectivity controls by focusing on the picture that benefits the source the most. How is that related to obesity? Through decades the image of women or men is being perceived by how media is framing it. For example, In the 30s, Lucky Strike had the weight loss campaign in parallel to their advertisement. Smoking Cigarettes causes weight loss, and that how they framed underweight models as being beautiful. In the 60s the body that is similar to Marlyn Monroe was the best to impersonate. Women empowerment started in the 70s as Media started campaigns in favor for women, and fashion was styled for women in the Disco era, making them very loose shirts and high waist pants, to look like men. That made the body image look very natural. Let's skip to the 2000's where the mediation of models to influence women around the world was about being underweight. Skinny models to European brands, had been casted the most to be on magazine covers. Where in the late 2000's a total extreme difference was framed and it is obese models. None of the frames selected being healthy yet. To have eating disorders comes in two

facades; the obesity and the underweight. Media here is trying to show varieties in order to make women feel beautiful the way they are in favor to feminists, but they are framing it in two very extreme ways. Where are the mediums gone within this? Framing body images has been taking over the Media for years, but did they ever took serious concern for that? Media as we know is a form of getting people connected together, and it's a form where coverage of the events of the world takes place. So where do they stand now in reference to obesity, a case study will be conducted in this research to exemplify the situation.

On the 30th of August 2018, Cosmopolitan Magazine has issued its Cover page with the Plus Sized Model Tess Holliday featured for its October Issue. Many were with, but many were against. Tess Holliday is an American Plus Sized Model based in Los Angeles. Holliday also self-describes herself as a "body positive activist". Her social media campaign on accepting your body the way it is, is trending with 1.7 Million Followers on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter. She has recently written a book about her being a fat girl. She weights over 300 pounds. This makes her a famous severely obese influencer. So is it okay to accept her body and to frame it as beautiful, just because she is famous? As we've experienced before, Media was criticizing overweight people, specially in recent years when they cropped the faces of obese people in articles making them a body and a number rather than existed individuals. On the day the magazine cover was featured, Holliday twitted proudly "Phew, I'm literally a COSMO GIRL!! Cant believe I'm saying that! Thank you @CosmopolitanUK for this incredible opportunity. If I saw a body like mine on this magazine when I was a young girl, it would have changed my life. Issue hits stands 8/31." (Holliday,2018). The first one to criticize this event was Piers Morgan on Good Morning Britain and on Twitter. 'She badly needs better friends, who are going to be more honest with her & explain she is dangerously overweight & should do something about it,' he tweeted. He also debates in the interview on the show that ''We should not be aspiring to be an unhealthy weight, be it far too skinny or far too fat, and the same goes for both women and men,''. ''For Cosmo to put this on their cover as something to aspire to is dangerous, wrong, and frankly misguided.'' (Morgan,2018). A week earlier, he tweeted his displeasure saying: "As Britain battles an ever-worsening obesity crisis, this is the new cover of Cosmo" (Morgan,2018). In response to that, Farrah Storr the cosmopolitan editor answered Morgan "When I put people on my cover, I'm not here to do a blood analysis", Farrah explained. "I'm not here to pass judgment. We have a crisis with mental health, and with people feeling bad about body image. So this is one cover that has a larger lady on the cover in a culture which venerates thinness. "I'm celebrating her. The reason she is on my cover is to explain that there is a different way to look. If there are millions of people who

see this and they have never been exposed to a body like this and go 'actually, you know what? For one day only, I'm going to feel great about myself…"(Storr,2018). After that Morgan was called a fat-shamer and Tess Holliday had to preserve herself on twitter and on TV stations. She tweets that she would have been happier as child if she grew up seeing people like her on covers. "My message isn't 'let's all be fat', my message is 'let's love yourself'. At the end of the day, I'm not doing this for people like Piers. I'm doing this for women around the world that need to see someone that looks like me to feel less alone and to understand that the way they look is beautiful." (Holliday,2018). They were focusing on being beautiful and with good mental health disregarding the body health. Media is talking about bodies and in particular woman bodies. It is the case where they showed an obese woman making her look beautiful. In this case they are framing women's body in being whatever she wants to look like. But where does this go wrong? It is when they show a plus sized model, but a very unhealthy one. People will be influenced by what the Media shows. Framing in media is simply a way to let people only think in the way they want them to. At some cases media do take the responsibility of framing news the way they want. But what about health here? Cosmopolitan is a very well known magazine, that woman and especially young ones read. It can be found in libraries, grocery stores, pharmacies, book stores and online. It is distributed in 32 languages in 100 countries. So is it okay to Frame being obese as beautiful and acceptable? My position here stands against this cover of Cosmopolitan featuring Tess Holiday and obese woman on the cover page. Obesity is a serious disease that has become epidemic. It has many medical, psychological, economical and social complications. According to The National Heath Service (NHS) "It's a common problem in the UK that's estimated to affect around 1 in every 4 adults and around 1 in every 5 children aged 10 to 11." (Obesity overview,2016). Obesity may result in diabetes mellitus, Cardiovascular diseases, Sleep Apnea and Cancer. It also leads to psychological problems like Depression, Low self esteem and confidence, Anxiety, Suicide, and Substance abuse. These Psychological effects might have been resulted from the social effect of obesity that we cannot ignore; the bias and negative attitude towards a person with overweight or obesity worries, for instance obese people may not fit and participate in many events for the size and weight will play a huge role in preventing them, and Fat shaming. The realization of the economical effects is terrifying, where NHS states that being overweight or obese is a risk factor to reduced productivity. Obesity complications may use medications and treatments that cannot be fully covered by insurance companies. Nowadays, Media Framing is concentrating on encouraging obese people around the world to feel good about themselves due to the bullying and fat-shaming they are receiving from other people. It is

Media's responsibility to clean the images they've put into people minds in being thin and look like Disney princesses and Barbies. They chose underweight models to present brands and products and produced films and TV shows with perfect bodies to become actresses and actors. Since we were young we grew up watching Disney princess which had perfect bodies, flawless life styles, and luxurious royal wedding. Barbie also was made to show women what the picture-perfect shape looks like. Taking Cosmopolitan had shown underweight models they might have influenced people to become anorexic and bulimic with eating disorders. They now want to encourage obese people and make them body activists. Health was ignored in both of the framing strategies.

Conclusion

Media should spread awareness about health and not about being beautiful. We are not born to be perfect we should regulate. Obesity in the case of Tess Holliday is a serious disease that can't be designed in a perfect frame in a perfect girl's lifestyle and popularity. Most of Health issues studies by Media were defined as isolated news. Bigger and more popular companies should focus on health, and not on being picturesque or not. In Cosmopolitan cover page case to make people feel okay about themselves is a debatable issue that went viral on various Media platforms. That was not a responsible act because people with obesity should work on themselves to get back their healthy lifestyle instead of than accepting their bodies the way they are. Governments should spread awareness in such cases because Obesity has become ubiquitous, it is proven that it is growing with high rates around the world. People will feel beautiful after a major health. I'd like to end this paper with tips that would help people start their healthy journey. According to The European Food Information Council, a non-profit organization, established in 1995, which stands up for science-based information on food and health; eat a variety of foods but in acceptable portions. Replace saturated with unsaturated fat and enjoy plenty of fruits and vegetables. Maintain a healthy body weight. Get on the move, make it a habit. Start now, and keep changing gradually.

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