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[Health & Medicine](#), [Obesity](#)



JENNIFFER BONILLA MS. LINDA LAPOINTE COMPOSITION II MONDAY 14TH, JULY 2008 OBESITY AND ITS SOCIAL ISSUES Obesity is a state of (being) overweight; it prevents normal activity or bodily function and will likely cause a serious or life-threatening disorder (" Morbid obesity"). Today, obesity seems to be something normal, common in America's society. No one cares about how this disease has developed through history, or how much it affects the daily lives of the people who suffer from it. Obesity is not only a health issue. Besides high cholesterol, and the risk of diabetes, obesity has social consequences. The problem is almost part of what defines America as a society, something that identifies the United States population. Not many, however, know that this problem was not always part of the history of this country; America used to be a very healthy nation. Many years ago, the only inhabitants in this land were Native Americans. These people lived in full contact with nature, living by it and for it, and not against it. They even called the plants and animals their brothers and sisters, all were children of their mother, Earth. Not many of these Native Americans were overweight; their diets were regulated by nature. Some years later the Europeans arrived and they changed the way things were made. They didn't see food as a sacred element of nature, but as something that had to be conquered. After they resettled here, they saw this land as a land of plenty, and prosperity where they could look for opportunities like freedom, wealth, and security that Europe didn't have at that time. This new concept of greatness became a crucial aspect of the new Americans' identity. The nation was full of optimism. People weren't poor anymore; meat, chicken, potatoes, ham, and biscuits fed their spirits and their stomachs (Sanna 35-39). These new

residents developed new ways of processing food, and as a consequence, agriculture was invented. Agriculture is not only the foundation of today's civilization, but also a tremendous contribution to the actual quality of American life ("Agriculture Practices and Food Technologies"). America became a first class country, unfortunately powerful enough to afford "the total direct and indirect costs of obesity and overweight conditions (that) reached \$117-billion in 2000" (Amrhein). America's perception of a sexy, healthy body has changed over this country's history. As Variyam said in his article, "...the obesity problem didn't occur overnight" and he explains that: U. S. and Western European populations have experienced steady gains in both weight and height since the late 19th century. These trends were triggered by an increased food supply that drastically reduced chronic malnutrition and accelerated the accumulation of what Nobel Laureate economist Robert Fogel has called psychological capital: enhanced body size and capacity of vital organs resulting from improved nutrition. The gain in psychological capital improved our capability to withstand disease and increased longevity. Between 1900 and 2000, life expectancy at birth in the U. S. increased by 65 percent for women and 60 percent for men...(also) men and women were gaining in body size-both weight and height-up through the middle of the 20th century. Unfortunately, while gains in height among U. S. adults have leveled off, weight has continued to increase, and markedly so since the beginning of the 1980s. Obesity is a problem that increased with the most delicious, but yet dangerous invention of all time, fast food. Ellyn Sanna reports that in the last years of the 19th century, food was reinvented. It began to be mass-produced, marketed, and standardized.

Cereal was also invented, and a freezing technique was created; America's diet was never the same. Fast food was a creation originated ironically not from the food industry, but from the car industry. The McDonald brothers applied the principles that Henry Ford used in his own company. From there on, McDonald's was the first fast food restaurant that offered fast food at an accessible price. The other restaurants, those where food was made at the moment, were too expensive compared with the new wave of fast food. Families were now able to dine outside more often and in a more affordable way (39-42). "...research has shown that Americans currently eat out, or order in, more than ever before -- fueling the trend toward weight gain. Food-market researcher Technomic found in a 2005 survey that 69% of consumers described their diets when eating out as " fair to poor," compared to 39% who said they eat " fair to poor" diets at home" (Gogoi). The United States of America is a country where obesity and gluttony are directly related. For most of this country's inhabitants, obesity is only the result of too much food, and too little exercise. Unfortunately, as said by Sandra Amrhein "...obesity and overweight conditions account for about 300, 000 deaths in the country every year, second only to tobacco-related deaths". No matter how shocking that number is, it is not hard to believe when " government studies show young people today may be the first not to live longer than their parents. " It seems that in America, unlike many other countries, people consider large amounts of food a must and they take for granted the opportunity of abundance. There is no surprise then in the fact that " 66. 3 percent of U. S. adults are overweight or obese". In addition, studies show that in "...2005, all fifty states had obesity rates of at least

14%. The problem is particularly bad in the South, where in twelve out of sixteen states at least 25% of the adult population is obese" (" Can you afford to eat right? ") Everybody knows that America is a " salad bowl" society, as some of the immigrants call it. What is not so well-known is how obesity is affecting every single stratum of this society. The CDC Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance system revealed that obesity is something that affects everybody, no matter the sex, the age, the race, the ethnic origin, the smoking status, or the educational attainment. In 2001, the groups that seemed more affected were the older age groups (68. 5%), Hispanics (23. 7%) and African Americans (31. 1%), and people with less than a high school education (27. 4%), but every other group is also suffering from this epidemic (Wexler 1, 5 [table 1. 1]). Obesity is an omnipresent problem in this society. Phil Lempert states frightening data in his report at the Progressive Grocer: " At this time roughly two-thirds of the American population is either obese or overweight, and close to half of these are obese, with a body mass index (BMI) of 30 or higher. " He also states that after a survey made by the ACNIELSEN market information company, experts realized that the top two reasons why people may want to reevaluate their diets were because of health and appearance. This splits the nation into two groups, diet for health vs. diet for appearance. This doesn't make the challenge of solving obesity easier. Americans' lifestyles changed through the years and their diets did too. History has had an important role: " In 1900, 18. 8 percent of women were in the workforce. With industry booming, many women found jobs in factories and mills..." (" Women of the Century"). This meant that women stopped spending two or three hours a day just cooking, and families dined

out more frequently than they used to, not only because of the lack of time, but because now they had more money to spend in expensive restaurants or fast food. According to Variyam, the Economic Research Service of the U. S. Department of Agriculture states that some ...studies show a 10 percent increase in income leads to a 4. 6 percent increase in food expenditures... with the food industry offering more choices—from fast food to a growing array of ethnic restaurants—the share of total food expenditure that America spend on dinning out has risen from 28 percent in 1962 to 47 percent in 2003. Now no one has time to cook anymore and the fastest answer or solution to the problem is now more modern, besides fast food and restaurant food, frozen food is now a first choice when breakfast, lunch, or dinner time arrives. “ According to a study most (29 percent) blamed lack of exercise, while only 19 percent said it was the easy availability of junk food—a factor just about tied with the “ ease of modern life" as key reason for being overweight" (Lempert). The bad news is that all of these options are not good choices, and families are facing struggles finding something nourishing. Frozen meals may look good, not only because they keep people on track with time and schedules, but also because they limit the portion of each meal. This sounds interesting when somebody is trying to watch his or her weight. The three hundred calorie packs, however, may be a bad choice. If an adult is consuming fewer calories than what he or she should have each meal time, then it is very possible this person would have high calorie and low nutrient snacks between meals, losing all the nutrients won in his or her breakfast, lunch, or dinner time (Collins). For Collins, when a person chooses a frozen meal over any other kind of food, this individual has to remember

that the choice has to be not only pro-time and pro-diet, but also pro-nutrient. A diet will not work if people are having three to five high caloric snacks between meals, no matter how nourishing the principal meal was. This situation may cause frustration, because even when this person is trying to lose weight, the results are not showing up. That frustration can be transformed into low self esteem issues and isolation from the society. Kelly Brownell and Rebecca Puhl have been investigating facts about discrimination against obese and overweight people for four years. They have focused on three levels or faces of people's daily lives; education, health care, and employment. Apparently, it is in these three environments where stigmas and bias are more influential. For example, 28% of teachers said that the worst thing that can happen to a person is to become fat. Also 24% of nurses said they felt repulsed by obese people, and according to the statistics, parents help their thin children more than their overweight kids for college. The attitudes of these people can be studied in many ways. Some of the attitudes are created from the belief that obese people lack self-control and are lazy, that obesity is caused by character flaws, and that failure to lose weight is due only to noncompliance. The Implicit Associations Test (IAT) revealed that even physicians who specialize in obesity treatment have anti-fat biases against their patients. These attitudes are so pervasive that even those who dedicate their lives to treating obesity are not immune to them, and most of the time, they are not conscious about it. It is important to note that the stigma of obesity is really different from the stigma of other marginalized groups. The reason for this is that obese people agree with the notion that overweight people are imperfect people; they accept and

internalize the anti-fat and pro-thin biases of society. Obese people fight against the discrimination with social activities and surgical treatments. As a matter of fact, Brownell and Puhl mention in their investigation that: Studies show that before a surgery, 87% of the patients reported that the weight prevented them from being hired, 90% reported feeling discriminated against by their co workers, 84% avoided being in public places because of their weight, and 77% suffered from depression. Some months after surgery, they reported almost non- discrimination situations, and more cheerfulness and confidence in their lives. The consequences of discrimination go beyond low self esteem and depression. There is evidence that some women choose not to become pregnant because they fear the fact that they can gain weight and never lose it. Other people don't quit smoking because they think that when they stop doing it, they will gain weight. People have a fear of being fat, a fear that is also supported by the perception that obese or overweight people are less competent, with lower self control, ambition, intelligence, and attractiveness. With this in mind, "...many people intensely dread the possibility of becoming obese. In one survey, about 25% of women and 17% of men said they would sacrifice three or more years of their lives to be thin" (Wexler 153, 154). Puhl and Brownell, however, refute the notion that stigma is necessary to motivate obese people to lose weight; indeed, they state that a reduction of stigma is necessary, if obese people want to stop competing against prejudice and discrimination. " Some of the fattest people in America are among the poorest" (Lubrano). That sentence materializes two supposed different realities and melts them into eleven words. It is hard to believe that people who are barely eating one or two times a day lead the percentages of



obesity in this country. Lubrano cites in his article, " University of Pennsylvania epidemiologist Shiriki Kumanyika and other investigators (who have) found that poor 15- to- 17- years- old-black or white, male or female- were fifty percent more likely to carry excessive poundage than non poor teens". Adam Drewnowski, also cited by Lubrano in his article, an epidemiologist of the University of Washington, conducted a study in 2007 that " showed that obesity rates in poor Seattle neighborhoods were 600 percent greater than in rich areas", even further, Drewnowski thinks that " the food crisis will make obesity and attendant diabetes even more rampant. " Drewnowski and his colleagues concluded, " Obesity in the United States is a socioeconomic issue-it is related to limited social and economic resources and may be linked to disparities in access to healthy food". The problem is that all these people who eat poorly everyday are also gaining weight. Why? Because "...lower-income groups eat not so much for nutrients but to stop being hungry", " but whereas it's cheaper and easier to eat extra calories, it has become harder to burn them off as television and other pastimes compete with physical activity. " These situations have led to that " The gap between what we say people should eat and what they can afford has become unacceptably wide. " (qtd. In " Can you afford to eat right? ") One of the points Lubrano supports in his article is that poor people live in neighborhoods where supermarkets are scarce, and people only find corner stores and convenience marts for groceries, something he calls " food desserts". These people only want to satisfy their hunger, so they eat high-fat, high-sugar foods. Mariana Chilton of Drexel University is also cited in Lubrano's article. She says " They are not thinking about health-just getting

through the day". Ironically, the Federal Government subsidizes the high fructose corn syrup that is in many junk foods found in the corner stores like sodas, chips, fries, and even burgers. Healthful, unsubsidized foods cost five times more per calorie to produce, thus driving up the price. To make things worse, Chilton's research points out that food stamps are not working as they should because of the high prices of food. One of the most shocking phrases Drewnowski uses is a sentence that practically summarizes the research. This sentence allows the writer to confirm the thesis that obesity is something beyond a health issue, that there are some social consequences that American society is suffering as a whole because: " Obesity is the toxic consequence of a failing economy" (Lubrano). Works Cited " Agriculture Practices and Food Technologies". Foundation Media Guide on Food Safety and Nutrition. 2007-2009. International Food Information Council. 12 June 2008 . Amrhein, Sandra. " Hispanic Waistlines growing in land of plenty. " Saint Petersburg Times 29 Dec. 2006. Tampabay. com. 28 May 2008 . Brownell, Kelly and Rebecca Puhl. " Stigma and Discrimination in Weight Management and Obesity. " The Permanente Journal 6. 3 (2003): 7 pars. 15 June 2008 . " Can you afford to eat right? " May 2008. TUFTS University Health and Nutrition Letter. 28 May 2008 . Collins, Karen. " Should you defrost your diet? "msnbc. msn. com 11 Apr. 2006. MSN. 15 June 2008 . Gogoi, Pallavi. " Fat Times for Fast Food. " Businessweek. com 9 Nov. 2005. Business Week Online. 27 June 2008 . " Morbid obesity." Webster's New Millennium™ Dictionary of English, Preview Edition (v 0. 9. 7). Lexico Publishing Group, LLC. 27 Jun. 2008. . Lempert, Phil. " Big Problem: It's a year later, and we're still too fat as a society. " Progressive Grocer 85. 18 (1

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