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Scientific Method Paper

Obesity in adults, especially children, has been a growing problem for years. What is causing this problem to grow? Should parents be held responsible for their own child's obesity or should the government take more action? These questions will be used to analyze the causes of obesity and if society treats obese people differently from people at a healthy weight. In this paper, I will review the studies conducted by Deborah Carr and Michael A. Friedman in their article "Is Obesity Stigmatizing? Body, Weight, Perceived Discrimination, and Psychological Well-Being in the United States", apply the situation to Rockford, IL, and propose ideas for future research.

Deborah Carr and Michael A. Friedman wanted to explore the discrimination of people of different weights. They studied the consequences of underweight, normal weight, and overweight/obese and whether or not they are treated differently based on their BMI (Carr and Friedman 246). Also, they studied if the perceived discrimination would continue if the demographics were controlled. To elaborate, those who are labeled as female, black, or uneducated are considered more likely to be obese, but there might be other factors that play into their discrimination because of their race or identified gender (246). Finally, they studied if the personal attributes of obese people influence the discrimination that they receive (246).

In their article, Carr and Friedman made scientific predictions based on their studies. They first hypothesized that those who are identified as obese will be taken for granted and treated unfairly (246). They also hypothesized that socioeconomic characteristics and demographics such as age, race, gender, and status will play a role into how and if an obese individual or group of people will be discriminated against (246). The idea that physical

attractiveness for women is more associated with being thin contributed to their prediction along the lines of gender (Friedman 247). The approach that Carr and Friedman choose to take will have an impact on their results.

To collect data, Deborah Carr and Michael A. Friedman used secondary analysis for their results. Their source of data came from a group known as MIDUS, which is also known as Midlife in the United States (250). In order to clarify certain aspects of their experiment, they declared the independent and dependent variables. In the data collected from Midlife in the United States, the body mass index (BMI) was the variable that was changed between different people (249). This variable was chosen to be the independent variable so that the researchers could compare the weights of people- a critical part of the study. The dependent variable was the perceived discrimination and experiences that happened to the subjects being observed in the experiment (248). The outcome for this variable will help to answer the questions and clarify the hypothesis proposed by Carr and Friedman.

Since Carr and Friedman looked at individual's behavior and the interactions between people, and it can be concluded that they used the symbolic interactionism theory in their research. According to Carr and Friedman, "research conducted over the past 40 years shows that obese persons are viewed as physically unattractive and undesirable" (245). While providing background information to their study, information like the quote provided above shows that Carr and Friedman are approaching this from the perspective of symbolic interactionism. This discriminatory treatment follows the micro level of analysis through interactions that result in subjective interpretations.

In the study conducted by Deborah Carr and Michael A. Friedman, I noticed much

strength in their methodology and theoretical approach. These researchers not only stated whether one had been discriminated, but they also researched why. Evaluations in the differences of people of diverse socioeconomic statuses closed research gaps that other studies neglected to consider (247). They were also clear to note that prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory actions are not the same thing. They countered previous studies by stating, “most studies document prejudicial attitudes toward obese people and presume that these attitudes will necessarily lead to discriminatory treatment” (Carr and Friedman 245).

On the other hand, there were also some weaknesses in their study. The main issue in their research was that they failed to study younger age groups since the age range in the study conducted ranged from ages 25-74. According to Rebecca Puhl, “Youth who are overweight are vulnerable to multiple forms of weight bias. Often, these children encounter verbal teasing by peers, physical bullying, and social exclusion”. These points can be classified as negative attitudes towards obese children and therefore can be considered prejudice. Carr and Friedman should have taken to account this form of prejudice since one-third of young overweight girls and one-fourth of young overweight boys are prejudiced against and this counts for a large portion of the population (Puhl).

In the study conducted by Deborah Carr and Michael A. Friedman, they concluded that Americans hold prejudicial attitudes toward overweight obese individuals. However, stigma processes encompass exclusions made by individuals and social institutions (253). Carr and Friedman also found that obese individuals with a BMI over 35 were “more likely than normal weight persons to report major discrimination, interpersonal discriminations, and work-related discrimination” (253). They also noted that those who were still considered overweight, but not extremely obese (BMI between 25 and 30) also experienced job-related discrimination (235).

They also concluded that the amount of discrimination experienced by obese individuals was similar among those of a different gender, race, and age.

After analyzing the results of Deborah Carr and Michael A. Friedman's study, I am able to apply this to the local area of Rockford, Illinois. In Rockford, one in three people are considered obese which puts the city at number four of the nations most obese metropolitan area lists (Fox). Rockford's obesity rate is currently standing at 35.5%, according to Melissa Westphal). Also, 23% of people living in Rockford are below the poverty line (Westphal). In relation to the study conducted by Deborah Carr and Michael A. Friedman, with the poverty rate so close to the obesity rate, it relates to their points about socioeconomic status. Although there have not been any recent case reports of job related discrimination in Rockford, Michelle Fox notes that health complications that come with obesity, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, and breathing problems, can make it difficult to find a job because employers may not see them "fit" for the job. I also found that in Rockford, when an obese or overweight person is discriminated or prejudiced against, it is most commonly referred to as "bullying" since most cases in Rockford are reported from schools. Finally, Michelle Fox noted that government facilities are taking action to promote healthy eating and exercise through school lunch programs and various activities and opportunities for people to take advantage of.

After examining the articles from Deborah Carr and Michael A. Friedman, Michelle Fox, Rebecca Puhl, and Melissa Westphal, I am proposing my own research questions and hypothesis to further the points previously made. The questions that I want to examine are: What is the cause of this growing epidemic of obesity? How are women going to be discriminated against differently from men? Also, instead of conducting experiments with adults between the ages of 25-74, how do the socioeconomic statuses of children and teenagers play into the concept of

discrimination? I will be comparing females to males to see which group receives more discrimination, if there is even any difference. In my study, the independent variable will be the BMI of the different individuals. After retrieving data, I will also compare between males and females to see if females experience greater discrimination. My dependent variable will be the extent that the individuals experience discrimination or prejudice.

In regards to clarifying the variables in the experiment, the term “individuals” applies to males and females with the BMI rate of 18 to 35. I chose this range in order to encompass a wide range of individuals. The term “obese” will apply to anyone with a BMI of 30 or higher and “overweight” for males and females with a BMI of 25-30. The socioeconomic factors that I would examine fall under the categories of race, gender, age, and status (both economical and social). Whom is considered a male or female will fall along how they identify themselves rather than what is on their birth certificate.

Unlike the study conducted by MIDUS and Deborah Carr and Michael A. Friedman, this study will apply more to the feminist perspective. Similar to the researchers Deborah Carr and Michael A. Friedman, the goal of the experiment will be to analyze the different interactions that individuals will experience based upon their weight. In this new study, it will expand to a younger age range and see if sexism plays a role into the study. Studies show that females are more often criticized for their weight than men (Benokraitis).

Initially when beginning the experiment, I would want to calculate and record the BMI of the volunteer participants. I would then divide them by their demographic like age, race, and gender. Placing the individuals in different social settings such as a fast food restaurant or a high-end restaurant, or schools where there are a large amount of people will allow them to be in the

presence of a wide range of individuals. I chose to divide them by their demographics so that I can later divide them equally so that the sample is equally present for each category.

One of the factors of Deborah Carr and Michael A. Friedman's study that was weak was the lack of including younger groups of people such as children and teenagers and further explaining their idea that females are judged more on their weight more than men. After the experiment is complete, I will interview the participants to record their own individual experiences. I will make charts to compare the males and females to see if there was a change in the amount of negative attitudes or behaviors that they encountered.

Overall, this study on the concept of obesity and the different ways people are treated or feel because of their weight ended up captivating my attention. Being able to apply the study conducted by Deborah Carr and Michael A. Friedman to the local area of Rockford put in perspective how stigmatizing behaviors towards others are prevalent everywhere.

Works Cited

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