
The Unnecessary Social Judgement of People with Obesity

Nowadays it is typical for people to judge others without knowing anything about them. Concerning the “Global, regional, and national prevalence of overweight and obesity in children and adults during 1980-2013: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2013” by the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) “Nearly one-third of the world’s population is obese or overweight ...” (Murray & Ng). Many of these people are hit by false accusations. In fact, “Psychological research shows that citizens tend to overemphasize internal factors and underemphasize external factors in attributing an individual's responsibility for actions or dispositions” (qtd. in Barry et al., p.329).

Most people think that people who are obese eat way more than those who have a normal shape. But this is not the case. According to data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey where adults were categorized in three groups, thin, muscular and fat, the number of calories each group regularly ingested did not much differ from each other. Instead, surprisingly the data showed that “there was an inverse relationship: thinner people were eating more than fatter people” (Callaway, p.27). This shows that many accusations against obese persons are inapplicable, because oftentimes these people can hardly do anything about it. What many people do not consider is that unhealthy food and a lack of physical activities are not the only factors leading to obesity. In fact, obesity can be caused by side effects of medical treatments or physical or mental health issues.

As mentioned before, there are many health problems that can lead to obesity. Some diseases go along with medical treatments and their side effects which then lead to weight gain. Firstly, one cause for weight gaining might be a diabetes treatment. Some patients have to eat a bigger amount of food than their bodies might need because it prevents having a low blood sugar level. This inevitable eating behaviour then results in gaining weight, because the body gets more calories than it needs and as a result cannot process it in the way it should (“Nine medical reasons for putting on weight”). Secondly, a steroid treatment, used to help dealing with asthma or arthritis, can lead to an increase in the appetite of the patients. Due to the fact, that it is very hard to suppress a continuous feel of hunger, patients eat too much, so that they gain weight. According to dietitian Catherine Collins, the probability of gaining weight through steroids increases the more and the longer these are consumed (“Nine medical reasons for putting on weight”).

Besides the side effects of medication, there are also a lot of illnesses where weight gain is pertained as a typical syndrome of the disease. One example for such a disease is the “Polycystic Ovary Syndrome”. “Over a third to 50% of PCOS subjects are overweight or obese” (Ogbuji, p.147). This “hormone-related” syndrome affects the functions of women’s ovaries and causes weight gain, mostly around women’s waists through a surplus of testosterone and insulin. (“Nine medical reasons for putting on weight”). Another disease, causing over-weight is “Fluid retention (oedema)”. This sickness causes congregations of fluids in some parts of the body, which lead to weight gain and swelling. It can occur during women’s periods as a common side effect, or all of a sudden in males as well as in females with the danger of affecting the kidneys and the heart (“Nine medical reasons for putting on weight”). In addition, there is a disease which is called “Cushing’s syndrome”. Cushing’s syndrome

involves a cortisol level which is greater than it should regularly be, which then leads to changes in the patients' minds and bodies (Findling & Young). Cushing's syndrome oftentimes affects people on "cortisol-like medications" or patients with "a problem with the adrenal glands or the pituitary" (Findling & Young). Amongst others, it results in weight gain and a "rounded face and extra fat on the upper back and above the collarbones" (Findling & Young).

According to Dorothy K. Kriegler, Harvey Cushing, who discovered this disease, characterized it as a "peculiar polyglandular syndrome including painful obesity". Furthermore, hyperthyroidism, a disease in which the thyroid does not work the way it should, causes overweight, too. According to Debmalya and Raychaudhuri "Hypothyroidism is associated with decreased thermogenesis, decreased metabolic rate, and has also been shown to correlate with a higher body mass index (BMI) and a higher prevalence of obesity". Due to the fact that this dysfunction of the thyroid has, amongst other factors, an impact on the metabolism of glucose and lipids as well as on fat oxidation, it "is associated with changes in body weight and composition" (Debmalya & Raychaudhuri).

Finally, also mental diseases can cause obesity. Most commonly binge eating disorders (BED) cause overweight. BED's are shaped by an abnormal eating behaviour occurring in those affected. These disorders do not only occur in obese persons, but it is said to be more frequent in this group of people (Zwaan, p. 51). Humans with this disorder cannot control their eating behaviour. For instance, it is characterized by "eating until uncomfortably full, eating when not physically hungry, eating alone and feelings of depression or guilt" (Zwaan, p. 51). This shows that obese people often cannot do anything about what and how much they eat, because their subconscious is controlled by the BED.

In conclusion, even though some obese people might be responsible for their appearance, in many cases obese people can hardly do anything about their overweight, due to the fact that it is caused by side effects of medication, it belongs to symptoms of diverse diseases or to an underlying mental disorder. No matter how much someone weighs, we can never know the reasons for that, so we should all stop judging others. It is time for us as a society to become aware of these problems and quit having prejudices. Stop making others' lives harder by judging and condemning them, we never know how hard their lives already are.