

Weight Bias in the Media: A Review of Recent Research

The aim of this review was to survey the topic of weight bias and stigmatisation in the media.

Results indicate that weight bias is present in child marketed media through character portrayal in animated cartoons and situational comedies. Results also showed that characters with overweight or obesity were almost three times more likely to be classified as physically unattractive than underweight or normal-weight characters. A correlation was also observed between the amount of media exposure and expression of weight stigma in children.

Weight bias in adolescent- and adult-targeted media was found to be present in situation comedies and movies, reality television, youtube, and news coverage. Results indicate that adult-targeted media tends to place blame on individuals by emphasising personal causes such as 'unhealthy diet,' and 'sedentary lifestyle'.

The review also investigated theoretical approaches to understanding the effects of weight bias in the media, such as social consensus theory – the theory that those exposed to the media may fail to consider real-life experiences and interactions and, instead, rely on the views of others.

Evidence was primarily based on studies from the US, thus may not be representative of a global population, as attitudes towards weight and obesity vary vastly globally and between cultures. The authors suggest that future research should investigate the moderating factors of ethnicity and age.

Ata, Rheanna N., and J. Kevin Thompson. "Weight Bias in the Media: A Review of Recent Research." *Obesity Facts*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2010, pp. 41–46, www.karger.com/Article/PDF/276547, 10.1159/000276547.