

COMPETING CONTEMPORARY DISCOURSES OF OBESITY

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Conventional/Official Discourses

- ▣ Calories in/Calories out
- ▣ Personal Responsibility
- ▣ Some environmental
- ▣ Two are distinct
- ▣ Environmental often redirected to personal

- ▣ Inconsistent with broader cultural discourses
- ▣ Example: Popular discourse
 - Obesity is a symptom rather than the issue
 - Emotional damage (or neglect) narrative
 - Individual and environmental components: reconfigured
 - Personal role but not responsibility (agency)
 - No longer moral/civic obligation; but opportunity
 - Rhetoric of self-actualisation and authenticity

News Coverage of Obesity

- ▣ U.S. Media
- ▣ 3 national newspapers; 2 national newsmagazines; 3 mainstream national network television stations
- ▣ 3+ minutes or 500+ words
- ▣ Key word search: obesity
- ▣ Framing Analysis
- ▣ 541 stories; 323 (60%) featured fatalism
- ▣ Three axes

Contemporary Life: (21%)

- ▣ Technology
 - Schools
 - Work
 - Computers for work tasks
 - Entertainment programming
- ▣ Work demands
 - ▣ Time
 - ▣ Stress
 - ▣ Lack of sleep
 - Unavoidable/impractical to avoid

- ▣ Biology/Evolution (21%)
 - Obesity (fat) gene
 - Fat but fit
 - Gender
 - ▣ Women propensity
 - ▣ Maternal aspects
 - Food and pleasure
 - Gut flora
- ▣ Can overcome
 - Herculean/ draconian measures
 - Unnatural

- ▣ Ineffective and detrimental legislation (18%)
 - School food provisions
 - Posting nutritional information in restaurants
 - Changing access to foods
- ▣ Objections
 - Not personal terms
 - Economically oppressive or regressive
 - Paternalistic
 - Neoliberal arguments

- ▣ Fatalism: Powerful trend
 - Continuing: Overweight or obese friend, e.g.
- ▣ Personal and environmental explanations are arguable merged; but unproductive, rendered as futile and negating each other
- ▣ Limbo or paralysis

- ▣ Multifactorial or multicausal model
 - Arguably more sophisticated way of eliding environmental arguments and, more precisely, institutional accountability and response
- ▣ Structural model
 - Recognise relationship between government, individuals, and institutions
 - Radical reorganisation of systems on various levels