

OBESI-TV

Modern Day Freak Show?

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Are reality television shows about obesity modern-day versions of freak shows, or are they meant to be educational and inspirational?

- According to the United States National Weight Control Registry Statistics, only 20% of initially obese dieters are able to maintain a loss of 10% of body weight for over a year!



Defining a “Freak”

- “‘Freak’ is not a quality that belongs to the person on display. It is something that we created: a perspective, a set of practices- a social construction” (Bogdan, xi).
- “‘Freak is a frame of mind, a set of practices, a way of thinking about and presenting people” (Bogdan, 3).

Presentation of Fat People in Freak Shows



- “The Ohio Fat Boy”
- “Purely mocking mode”
 - “Tiny Brown”
 - “Baby Ruth”
 - “Alpine”
 - “Jolly Trixie”
 - “Dolly Dimples”
- Women wore dainty little girl’s clothing



Fat People and Marriage in Freak Shows

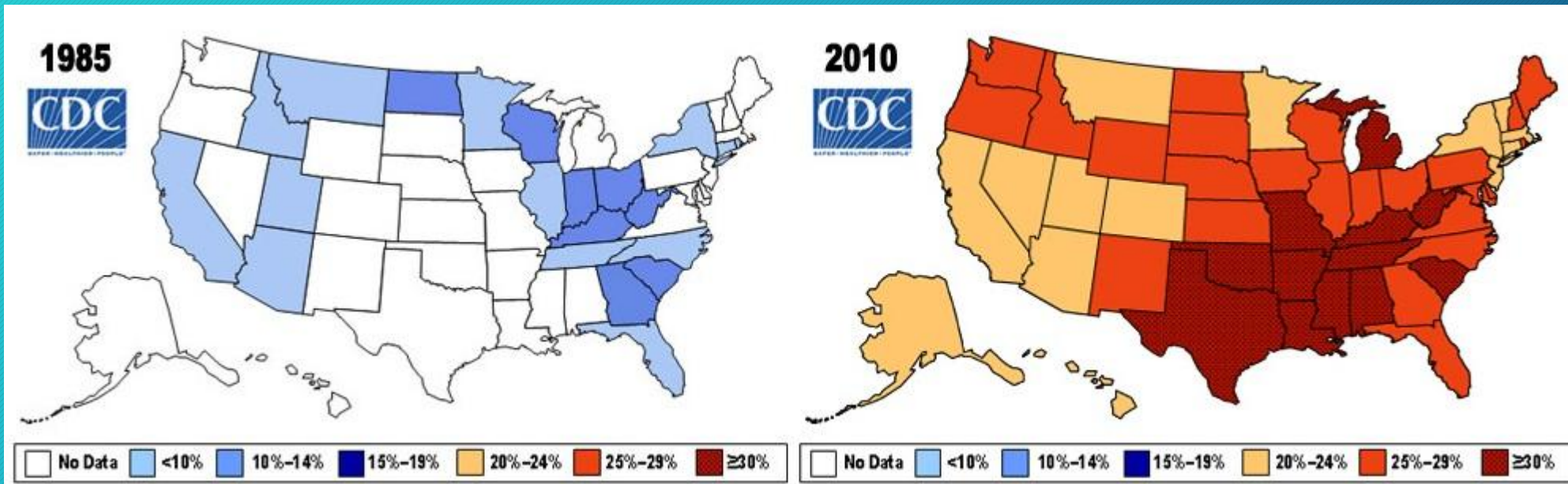


- 1892: Marriage of “Heaviest Couple Alive”
 - Chauncey Morlan and Annie Bell
 - 1,148 pounds
- Ringling’s “Living Skeleton” Pete Robinson (58 lbs.) and Bunny Smith (467 lbs.)
- 1870: John Battersby (40 lbs.) and Hannah Perkins (688 lbs.)



Obesity was rare during freak shows of 1800s, but now is a reality for 30% of the population (Backstrom).

- Decreased life expectancy
- Increased diseases and other health conditions
- GDP and gender influences
- Prevention
- Major impact on healthcare (Haslam and James).



Characteristics of Obesi-TV

- Obesity portrayed as changeable condition
- Psychological and medical challenges presented
- “Self-change”
- Protagonists are producers, ex: *Ruby*

(Backstrom).

- Factual, competition, intervention
- Educational resource
- What shown or deleted gives viewers different perceptions
- “Scare tactics” such as slow motion and close ups

(Stein).

What Attracts Viewers to Television

- The “Bizarre”
- Inaccessible situations
- Study: audiences prefer to view strong visual images such as a heart surgery procedure rather than an informational story of how to prevent heart disease

(Chapman and Lupton).

Supersize Versus Superskinny

- British series in which anorexic and obese individuals swap diets
- America is a “terrifying glimpse of the future”
- Becky’s weight is “Jaw dropping”
- “Treated like an animal”
- “Prisoner in her trailer”
- Contrasting portion sizes



Fat Doctors

- British series following life of extremely obese and doctors portrayed as heroes
- Jean Marie feels like a freak, “Treated like a leper,” “Doesn’t deserve a place in society”
- “So fat that her heart doesn’t break” when people bully her
- “Time is running out: Unless she loses weight she will be dead in the next five years”



Fat Families

- “Whopping”
- “Devour”
- “Monumental 1500 lbs.”
- “Enough to feed half a football team”
- “Titanic”
- “Freakish”
- “Frightening”



Extreme Makeover: Weight Loss Edition

- Trainer Chris Powell portrayed as hero
- Season 3 episode 9- Alyssa is 275 pounds overweight
- Focuses on number on scale: starves herself, then purges
- Show evokes emotions of audiences
- Inspirational ending even if goal not met

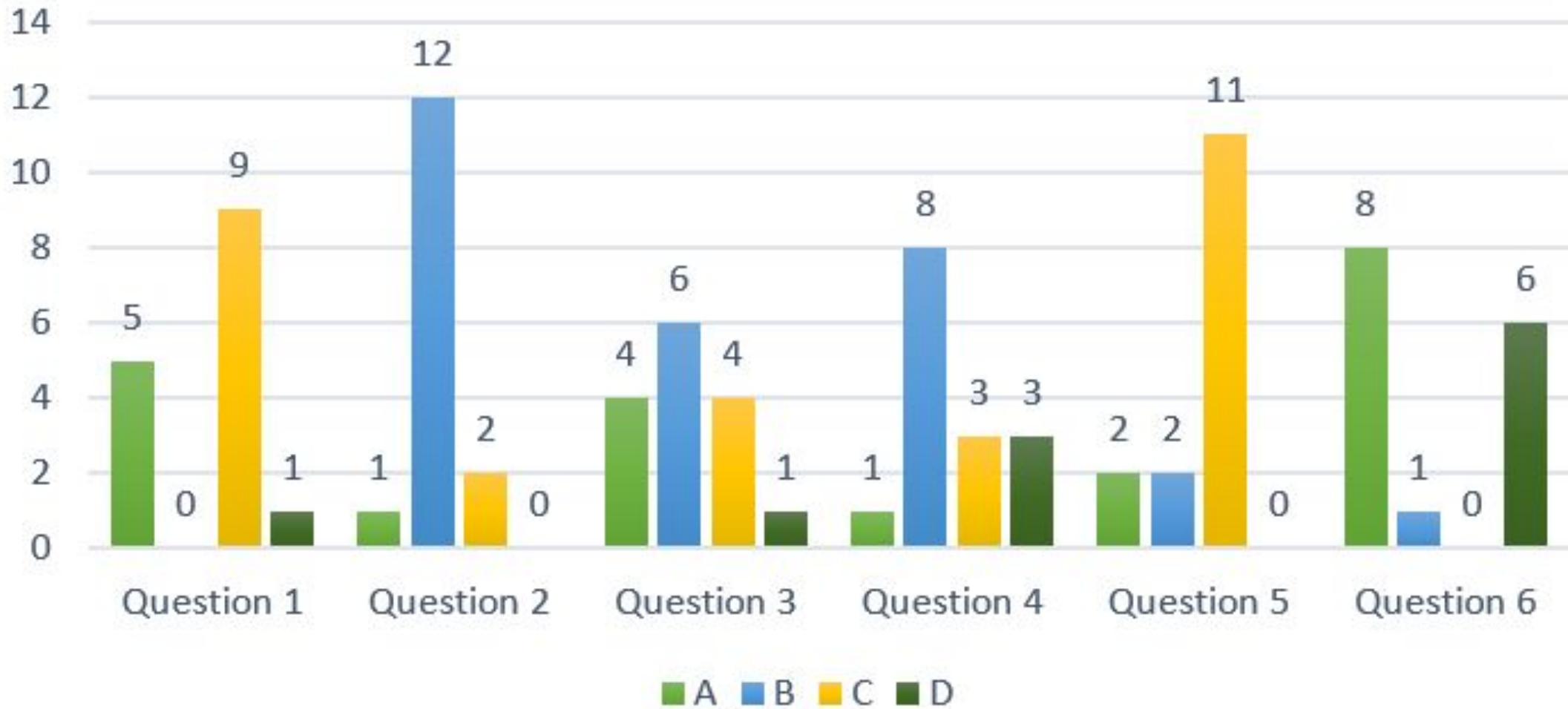


“My 600-lb Life, I Haven’t Walked in Ten Years”

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jb8mPchlyfE&list=PLnyeHxT53fRzMKTTCJOE2rCzSp16qUMG&index=9>



Obesity Survey Results



Survey Results

1. Which describes best how you felt during this viewing?
 - a. Intrigued by the massive weight of the individual
 - b. Not impressed, obesity is a common issue today
 - c. Concerned for the health of people in today's society
 - d. Eager to learn more about the causes and treatment for the obese
2. How do you feel about the obese individual?
 - a. Sympathetic; it is not the individual's fault that he or she is obese
 - b. Sympathetic; but with self-discipline this individual can improve his or her lifestyle
 - c. Not at all sympathetic, the individual chose this lifestyle, so he or she is solely responsible for his or her issues
 - d. Not at all sympathetic, the individual probably enjoys the attention and being taken care of
3. If you woke up one morning and weighed 600 pounds, how would you feel?
 - a. Depressed and helpless
 - b. Freaked out by my massive weight
 - c. Concerned, but I would stay calm to think of a solution
 - d. Embarrassed

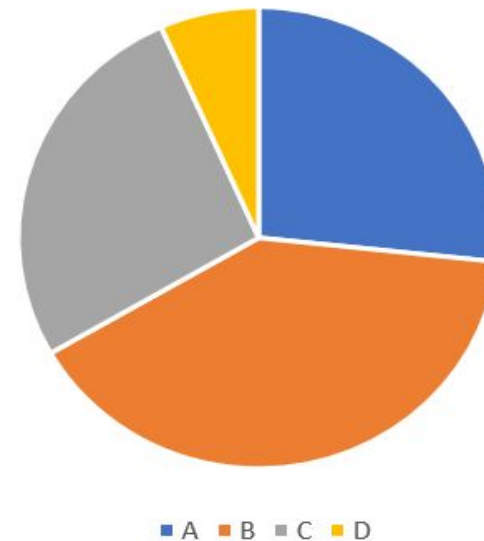
Question 1



Question 2



Question 3



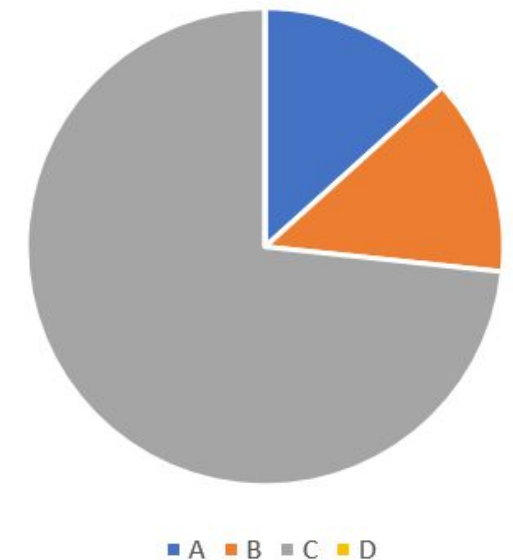
Survey Results

4. Which of the following would be the most interesting to watch on television?
- a. A gory operating room during gastric bypass surgery
 - b. An interview with a doctor discussing how to prevent obesity and related diseases
 - c. A 600-pound individual trying to leave his or her home to visit the doctor, but he or she is too large to fit through the doorway
 - d. An obese individual going through a mental breakdown because of weight and family drama
5. Which statement best describes what you got out of this viewing?
- a. I was amazed at the size of this individual and did not want to stop watching
 - b. I was disgusted at the size of this individual and could not stand watching
 - c. I gained some insight on the way of life of obesity individuals and/or learned something new
 - d. I was inspired by how this individual handled his or her problem of obesity
6. What do you believe the intention of the producer of this show?
- a. To educate viewers on the way of life of obese individuals
 - b. To scare viewers by showing the horrors of obesity
 - c. To entertain viewers with an interesting show about the obese
 - d. To gain viewership by showing the unusual and things people normally would not have access to see in a comfortable environment

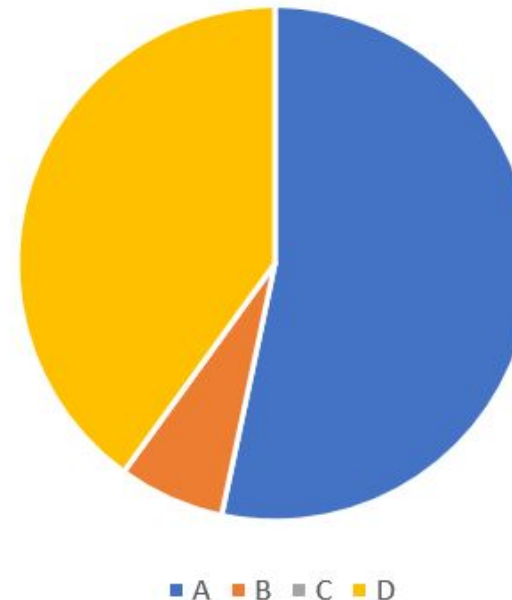
Question 4



Question 5



Question 6



Comments from YouTube Viewers

Wrestling Scholar Bernkastel 3 months ago (edited)

Oh my god, it's real life Jabba the Hutt.

Reply • 10  

Le Jams 10 months ago

i feel bad for watching this just to boost my self esteem 😊

Reply • 305  

[View all 28 replies](#) ▾



Don't Hate Me Cause I'm Bootiful 3 months ago

Le Jams I usually watch this so i can stop telling myself to lose weight since i'm the normal weight for my age

Reply • 1  



heyimdaph 2 months ago

I have this thing on my treadmill where you can watch videos and im watching these for motivation

Reply •  

Grace Williams 4 months ago

why would someone wait until this stage... no one should above 400 pounds.

Reply • 5  

Kaitlyn Kennedy 3 months ago

I really don't understand how you can let this happen. like how can you look at yourself and think "this is a healthy weight" then keep eating? I don't understand

Reply • 2  

FuNNy 4 months ago

I think at that point it's too late to lose weight

Reply • 2  



The Keyboard Warrior 3 months ago

its still possible

Reply •  

Carl Walton 1 day ago

Haven't walked in 10 years, how in the hell isn't she dead from blood clots etc...

Reply • 1  


Faronstream 11 months ago

I feel like a greek god compared to her

Reply • 155  

[View all 9 replies](#) ▾

shawn gonzales 1 month ago

f  shoot that creature!!!!

Reply • 1  

Noor Alazzawi 4 months ago

I feel so bad for her 😞

Reply • 173  

[View all 11 replies](#) ▾



DannyRd Tv 2 months ago

Noor Alazzawi same I would hate to be fat :(

Reply • 5  

lilsavagepotato 1 month ago

She is not useless she is beautiful, her husband is so helpful !!

Reply • 1  

DollopTM 1 month ago

"words cant explain how much i hate laying in this bed" honestly I think the bed hates you more.

Reply • 2  

Modern Day Freak Show?

- How do most people perceive television shows about obesity?
- Is it human nature to be entertained by the unusual?
- Obesi-TV shows can be described as freak shows depending on the audience's perception.
- Is it possible for reality television shows regarding obesity to develop into educational and inspirational programs?

References

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What's Your Perception? Any Questions?

THANK YOU!