

December 14, 2004

SUPERSIZED BIAS II

Big Media Continue Skewing Obesity Debate (May-October 2004)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Diet and obesity continue to weigh heavily on the minds of Americans. Those concerns have carried over to the news media, but the coverage takes on a strong anti-business slant, as if businesses and advertisers were responsible for obesity. Earlier this year, the MRC's Free Market Project released a study showing a significant anti-corporate trend in the major media's food reporting. Journalists are providing more coverage of individual responsibility as a cause of obesity, but this report documents extensive bias and misinformation in media coverage of the issue.

The original FMP study analyzed all 205 news stories about obesity published in *The New York Times*, *USA Today*, or aired on the three broadcast network evening newscasts and nighttime magazine shows between May 1, 2003 and April 30, 2004. This new analysis covers 97 stories in the same media and spans the six-month period between May 1, 2004 and October 31, 2004. Among the new findings:

- **ABC News Still the Most Biased, *Times* still skewed:** ABC aired seven stories that blamed business practices for obesity, compared with just three that highlighted personal responsibility. This continues its record from the Free Market Project's earlier study where they covered 16 stories, and 15 of them blamed business practices for causing obesity. *The New York Times* stories continued to be skewed against business and the free market. However, *Times* staffers did give some coverage to personal responsibility as a reason for weight gain.
- **Anti-Corporate Activists Still Front and Center, Businesses Still Bypassed:** Journalists relied on small activist groups to portray a slanted

view of the obesity debate. Fifty-six percent (44 times) of the experts quoted were anti-industry, while only 44 percent of those quoted were pro-industry experts (34 times). Two of those stories criticized the very industry experts they were quoting.

- **Personal Choice Still Favored Over Government-Imposed Solutions:** On a positive note, nearly half of the stories in our study (48 percent) focused on personal solutions to obesity. More than 30 percent (30 stories) had arguments for new burdens on business such as regulations or a “fat tax.” Eight of ABC’s nine stories presented government involvement in the “obesity epidemic” as positive.
- **Journalists Can’t Get Their Statistics Straight:** Several stories overstated childhood obesity rates as being nearly 100 percent higher than they actually were. For example, *USA Today* reporter Nanci Hellmich cited three different numbers in a two-month span. Those numbers ranged from 16.5 percent (nearly correct) to more than 30 percent.
- **Activists’ Agendas Still Hidden:** Anti-corporate activists were treated as unbiased “experts” in nearly every obesity story. This mirrors results from the previous study and represents a problem in the media. The liberal Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI), for instance, was called a “consumer group” and food industry critic Marion Nestle was portrayed as a “nutrition professor,” even when she was criticizing the industry for providing healthier food options. Conservative groups didn’t receive the same treatment. For example, a conservative organization was labeled as “an advocacy group funded by the food industry.”
- **Free Market Largely Ignored:** Businesses continue to respond to consumer demand for healthier foods, but the media typically ignore them. Only 18 percent of news stories (just 18 out of 97) discussed ways that corporate America is addressing the obesity crisis. Ironically, this represents an improvement from our previous study. At the same time, it shows a media that pays little attention to free market solutions.

This report repeats the Free Market Project’s call for better news coverage of obesity and recommends three ways to accomplish it. First, news organizations must do a better job investigating and reporting the agenda and track record of advocacy groups such as CSPI. Second, balanced reporting requires journalists to include an appropriate response from either the targeted corporation or industry association along with any attacks on that group. Finally, while it is easy for reporters to build stories around activists’ demands for government intervention, it is important to balance those with recognition of the principles and benefits of America’s free market system.

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DIRECTOR, FREE MARKET PROJECT

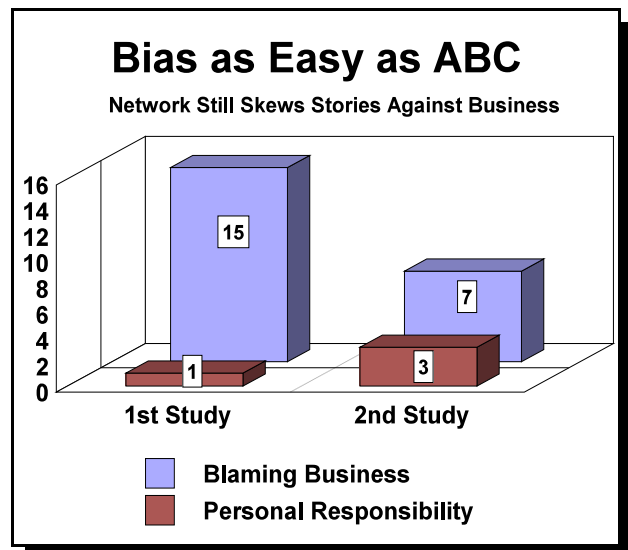
CHARLES SIMPSON
RESEARCH ANALYST

Obesity has become one of the most commonplace health issues covered by the mainstream media. This summer, networks and newspapers were full of stories on fad diets, recipes and overweight adults trying to lose weight. *Time* magazine and ABC News even sponsored a national “Summit on Obesity” in early June to much fanfare, but questionable journalistic result.

Through it all, one thing remained clear: The media presented an anti-business viewpoint in their coverage of obesity. In addition, the stories cited alarmist and inconsistent statistics about the size of the weight problem in young people. In several cases, those statistics were nearly twice that of the actual problem.

Weight loss was thrust into the spotlight by the recent admission that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention wildly misstated the impact of obesity on death rates. The CDC had concluded that obesity was responsible for up to 400,000 preventable deaths a year, but inflated that result by tens of thousands because of statistical errors. This is in addition to the ongoing criticism CDC receives for its reliance on the Body Mass Index as a way to determine obesity. The BMI is highly flawed and counts muscular athletes as “overweight” or “obese.”

In January, the government is due to release the five-year update to its



nutritional guidelines, so the topic of obesity is sure to stay in a prominent place on news pages for some time.

This study follows directly on the heels of another analysis of the media's obesity coverage, released on June 2. This latest assessment was designed to answer the question: Have the media improved their coverage of obesity? While there is some increased attention to personal responsibility, the answer is a solid "No."

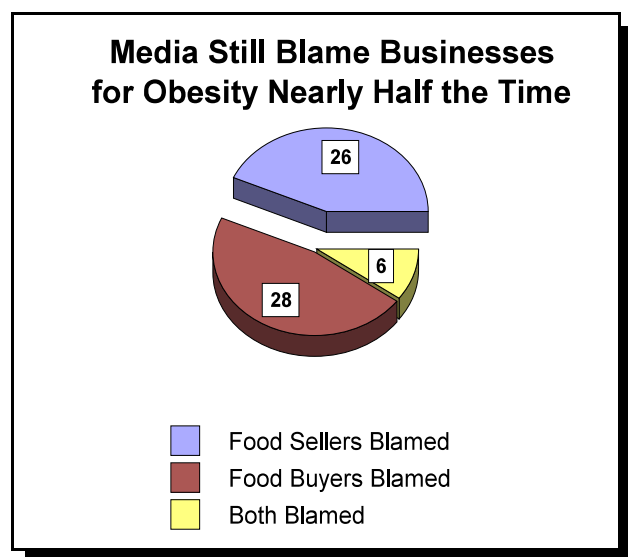
The news media offered extensive obesity coverage during the period of May 1 to October 31, 2004, the time period for the follow-up study. The previous analysis had covered 205 stories in a 12-month span from May 1, 2003 to April 30, 2004, or about 17 per month. This update analyzed 97 stories in six months, a slightly slower pace. *USA Today* led the latest study with 38 stories on the topic.

While *The New York Times* improved the balance of its reporting, ABC's bias (especially in light of the obesity summit) was flagrant. The coverage from CBS (9 stories) and NBC (6 stories) was relatively fair. Though *USA Today* offered mostly objective reporting, it camouflaged the agendas of many radical activists groups mentioned in its stories. That mistake was common among the media we studied.

Blaming Food Sellers, Not Food Buyers

The media have employed extensive resources seeking the reasons behind American weight gain. The debate remains: Is obesity the result of poor lifestyle choices and medical problems? Or does big business bear responsibility for America's growing waistline by creating and marketing unhealthy foods?

That debate typically comes down to either business practices or personal choices. To gauge the balance of this debate, our researchers were asked to tally all of the comments in a story by both the reporter and individuals either quoted or shown in TV sound bites. They counted the number of statements presenting the idea that responsibility lies a) with individuals or b) with the business practices of individual companies or the food industry at large.



If the comments tilted in favor of one of those concepts by a greater than two-to-one margin, the story was categorized as promoting that point of view. If the ratio was less than two-to-one, the story was classified as balanced.

The stories in this section showed some movement toward acknowledging personal responsibility. The media reported about diet camps for young and old and focused some light on new, healthier products being produced by private industry. Despite this, many of the stories simply relayed typical anti-food industry talking points that complained about marketing and the dangers of typically popular foods.

The media showed strong improvement in who they chose to blame for obesity. In the previous study, the stories overwhelmingly blamed big business more than the individual consumers with 64 percent placing blame on business. This time, with the exception of ABC, the media did a better job of balancing the blame for the obesity epidemic. Stories blamed food sellers 26 times, food buyers 28 times and both six times.

The print media were the most fair: *USA Today* and *The New York Times* attributed blame to food sellers 16 times and consumers 21 times. ABC blamed food producers seven times and consumers only three times. Even the stories that cited personal responsibility still slipped in criticisms where “Colonel Sanders” was cited for causing weight gain in one CBS story about diet camps.

“Colonel Sanders – responsible for so much weight gain.”

– Morley Safer,
60 Minutes

ABC’s reporting was heavily biased against food sellers – from news anchors to correspondents. Anchor Peter Jennings concluded his comments on the May 31 *World News Tonight* by warning: “Despite all the innovations in science and medicine, today’s children may be the first generation to be less healthy than their parents.” To Jennings, unscrupulous food companies were at fault: “In the battle over the diet of America’s children, it is estimated that the average child watches over more than 40,000 ads a year selling junk food. It is hard for even the most vigilant parent to compete.”

The in-depth reporting by the *Times* was largely fair, but one piece merited special criticism. In an August 29 news and analysis piece, Dale Buss asked the question, “Is the food industry the problem or the solution?” Buss explained that companies are obsessed with “thwarting childhood obesity.” He cited several examples of reduced-fat offerings and fruits appearing in fast-food meals. Despite this progress, he scolded them: “For decades, of course, the industry has been known for serving up sugary or fat-laden products, promoted with ceaseless advertising. And despite all the new, healthier options, that will not change. ‘If they stop, their competitors are right

there and will fill the void,' said Dr. Walter Willett, chief of the nutrition department at the Harvard School of Public Health."

Buss was on the verge of making a significant point but stopped short. Dr. Willett's message was that consumers determine demand for products, not business. Buss outlined all of the steps companies are taking to save consumers from obesity without answering the question he could have asked in the first place: "Are food consumers the problem or the solution?"

Marian Burros, of the *Times*, deserves credit for her overall coverage. For example, in an August 12 article, she acknowledged the most basic axiom in weight loss: "The number of calories consumed should not exceed the number of calories expended." Despite the added media focus on personal responsibility, that message was not common.

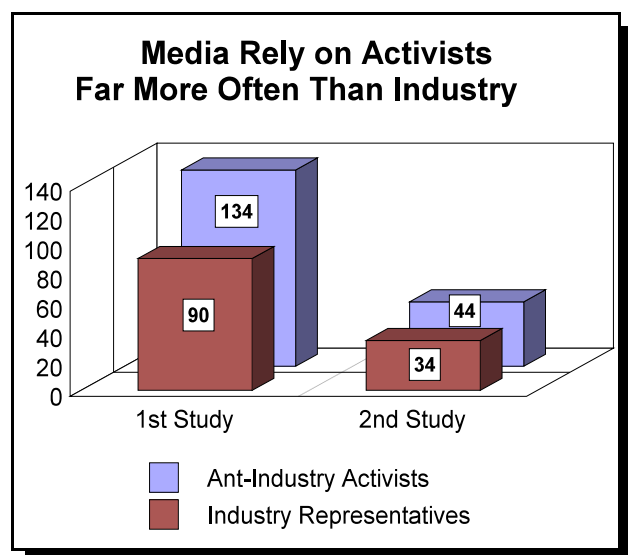
Even in the midst of well-balanced stories, little criticisms slipped in. On the September 19 episode of *60 Minutes*, co-host Morley Safer discussed how people flock to Durham, North Carolina to attend weight-loss clinics. Safer explained that a previous diet fad – the rice diet – had put Durham on the map and celebrities descended on the city. Among the ones he cited was "Colonel Sanders – responsible for so much weight gain."

The same story made it clear that both overweight people and doctors they talked to agreed that it was the result of personal responsibility, not fast food.

Shunning Companies, Pumping Anti-Corporate Activists

Journalists continue to rely largely on anti-corporate activists to make their points about obesity. Liberal activists and food industry opponents were found urging government action or even complaining about healthier options made available to consumers. Such groups figured prominently in both studies.

In a June 3 report for ABC's *World News Tonight*, Bob Woodruff aired the grievances of a Nader-ite activist group, the Center for Science in the Public Interest



(CSPI). Woodruff began: “The food industry spends \$13 billion a year marketing to children, using cartoon characters to entice them to eat high-fat snacks.”

Then, CSPI’s Margo Wootan (a proponent of the “fat tax”) weighed in: “Studies show, and the food industry knows, that advertising affects children’s food choices, their food preferences, and what they ask their parents to purchase.”

Dr. Marion Nestle, an agenda-driven nutritionist at NYU, is given camera time: “The last thing in the world they want to argue with their kids about is food, and the marketers know that. And so, they deliberately target the advertising to generate what they call the nag factor.”

Woodruff ran to the Federal Trade Commission asking about regulation: “Why not have the government step in and ban some of it?”

Though they were the subject of so much discussion, no business or representative group was put on camera to deflect these attacks.

The stories from the latest analysis gave companies a forum to address their critics less than half the time. Activists were quoted 44 times in our survey. Business spokespeople were included only 34 times and in two of those cases they were undermined by the way they were presented.

“How many people order McDonald’s French fries because they think they’re somewhat healthier? They eat them because they taste good. ... They’re coming in for a Happy Meal, not a healthy one.”

- Cynthia Bowers,
CBS Evening News

In a September 28 “Reality Check” for the *CBS Evening News*, Cynthia Bowers addressed McDonald’s promises to cut “artery-clogging trans fat from its frying vats.” However, her story was little more than a sounding board for CSPI.

The compelling evidence against the fast-food giant? A sound bite from Michael Jacobson of CSPI: “McDonald’s hasn’t done anything.” Bowers trumpeted his claim: “The Center for Science in the Public Interest is so outraged that McDonald’s hasn’t fully switched to healthier cooking, it recently put the company’s feet to the fryer with this full-page heart attack ad.”

In lieu of a McDonald’s representative, Bowers offered a meek defense: “For its part, McDonald’s points out it has cut some of the fat on chicken products, but warned consumers last year the fries will take a bit longer, but they are continuing with ongoing

tests. But let's be honest. How many people order McDonald's French fries because they think they're somewhat healthier? They eat them because they taste good." She concluded, "They're coming in for a Happy Meal, not a healthy one."

Camouflaging the Crusaders

Activists that are front and center in the obesity debate were given little scrutiny by the press that was so fond of interviewing them. A recurring theme in obesity coverage is the major media's selective disclosure of the agendas of the experts it interviews. They rarely labeled any liberal groups, though other views didn't receive the same treatment.

For instance, while reporters were comfortable with calling the Center for Consumer Freedom an "advocacy group funded by the food industry," such transparency wasn't applied to extremists like the Center for Science in the Public Interest, which was typically called a "consumer group." CSPI is the same group that recently called the Hardee's Monster Thickburger "food porn." They are also strong advocates for government intervention with obesity and other health-related issues.

Nanci Hellmich, *USA Today's* nutrition reporter, peddled a survey from CSPI that "may confirm the obvious to some, but it comes at a time when about 20% to 30% of children are overweight or at risk of becoming so."

Late Night Cynicism

A June 2 *Nightline* story was both unfair to food producers and casually dismissed personal responsibility.

Ted Koppel began with a condescending monologue against the notion of personal responsibility as expressed by a talk radio show and "areas about which he clearly knows little or nothing."

He continued: "Anyway, I gather that my friend, the radio host, was put out by the notion that obesity might be the responsibility of anyone other than the obese person."

This report was one of many featuring Dr. Marion Nestle. Her comments only bolstered criticism that she is more anti-corporation than pro-public health.

After an introduction, she made this contradictory statement: "We see much higher rates of obesity among poor people in inner cities and in the rural areas, everywhere. And the irony, of course, comes from the fact that these are exactly the people who also have trouble getting enough food."

Nestle insinuated companies should be held accountable for an "ironic" situation simply because they are so effective at providing products consumers demand. However, she failed to address the fact that the obese do not "have trouble getting enough food." There is no way around that fact.

The bulk of the *Nightline* story discussed the correlation between poverty and obesity, calling fruit a "luxury good" in the inner city and ignoring that the grocery industry relies on economies of scale to provide products consumers desire.

This May 12 story presented a survey from an agenda-driven group and used it to support an inflated view of childhood “obesity.”

Full disclosure was rare and positive discussion of the free market was rarer still. In a June 3 *USA Today* piece, an allusion to progress in the food community as a result of the free market was quickly diminished by a partisan activist.

Reporter Bruce Horovitz started: “One of the last major holdouts in the better-for-you food juggernaut – contract food service – is about to jump on the health bandwagon.” Horovitz found input from an Aramark representative: “We can get more people in the cafeteria if we give them more healthy options.” However, Nestle offered a cynical assessment: “Is it a good concept from a nutritional standpoint? I think not although it may work as a business strategy.” Nowhere did Horovitz disclose that Nestle is overwhelmingly critical of the food industry.

USA Today didn’t label Nestle even when she made her extreme attitudes clear. A September 3 piece by Julie Schmit simply titled her “nutrition professor Marion Nestle at New York University.” While that article gave no background about her positions, it quoted her commenting on new PepsiCo “Smart Spot” products. The “Smart Spot” line includes healthier, baked versions of Cheetos and Lays potato chips, foods Nestle said people “shouldn’t be eating at all.”

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ABC showed exactly how not to handle the issue. On July 16, *World News Tonight* made a point of labeling Rick Berman, from the Center for Consumer Freedom, as being from “an advocacy group funded by the food industry.” About a month later, on August 24, they interviewed Nestle and gave her no clear label, despite her strident views against the food industry. She was simply called by her formal titles, “Professor” and “Chairman, New York University Nutrition Department.”

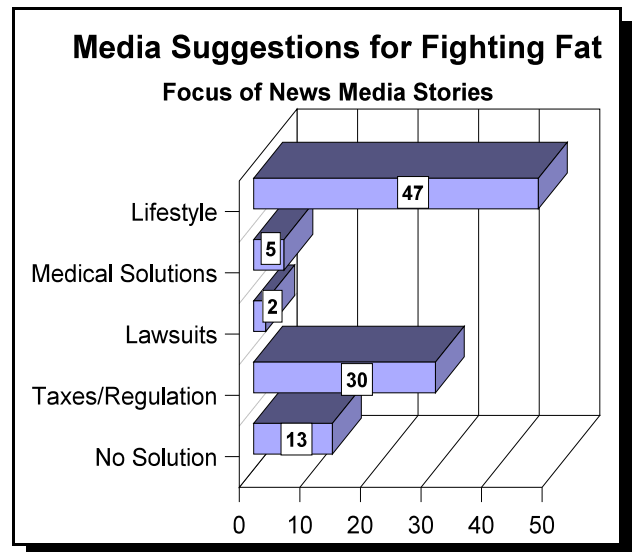
Once again, Marian Burros of the *Times* deserves credit. In an August 25 story, she labeled the Center for Science in the Public Interest as “a nutrition advocacy group that frequently criticizes the food industry.” While that only hinted at CSPI’s radical anti-business position, it was a huge improvement and far better than most of her peers.

Personal Choice Favored Over Government-Imposed Solutions

Obesity is a highly personal issue and the stories we analyzed reflect that. Stories that had given close to a 50-50 split between blaming business or consumers still focused more on personal solutions than any of the tax and regulatory schemes recommended by the activists. The reason is that many news stories profiled individuals who had succeeded in shedding excess weight, or asked medical experts for advice that would help those who wanted to slim down.

Some news stories mentioned more than one solution, and some stories never suggested any remedies. Our Free Market Project researchers identified four ideas that received the most coverage: new taxes or regulations on food companies; lawsuits or other attempts to bully companies into conforming with the activists' wishes; medical solutions, including new drugs or surgery; and lifestyle changes, where individuals improved their own eating and exercise habits.

Nearly half of those (48 percent or 47 stories) focused on personal solutions to obesity. More than 30 percent (30 stories) had arguments for new burdens on business, such as regulations or a "fat tax." Litigation was discussed in only 2 percent of the stories. And a medical solution was proposed in roughly 5 percent. Thirteen stories offered no solution. ABC continued its anti-corporate trend. Eight of ABC's nine stories presented government involvement in the "obesity epidemic" as positive.



A July 16 report by John McKenzie for ABC's *World News Tonight* was a revealing example of how the concept of personal choice is often an afterthought. McKenzie discussed the government's decision to cover obesity under Medicare. In the middle of the report, McKenzie said: "An advocacy group funded by the food industry argues obesity is not an illness, but a matter of personal responsibility."

McKenzie incorporated a sound bite from Rick Berman of the Center for Consumer Freedom: "This is really ridiculous. Classifying obesity as a disease is dumbing down the term 'disease.' There's no doubt about that. And people can control this in most cases by going on diets and staying on them." McKenzie followed with:

“Health officials disagree.” Then, McKenzie included a sound bite from Tommy Thompson, the secretary of Health and Human Services: “When you spend \$118 billion on obesity-related illnesses and 400,000 Americans die, I mean, that becomes more than just an individual problem. That becomes a countrywide problem.”

Thompson’s quote doesn’t address whether obesity is a “disease.” Nor does it comment on moderation as the best solution to obesity. Actually, it isn’t clear whether the two quotes disagree whatsoever.

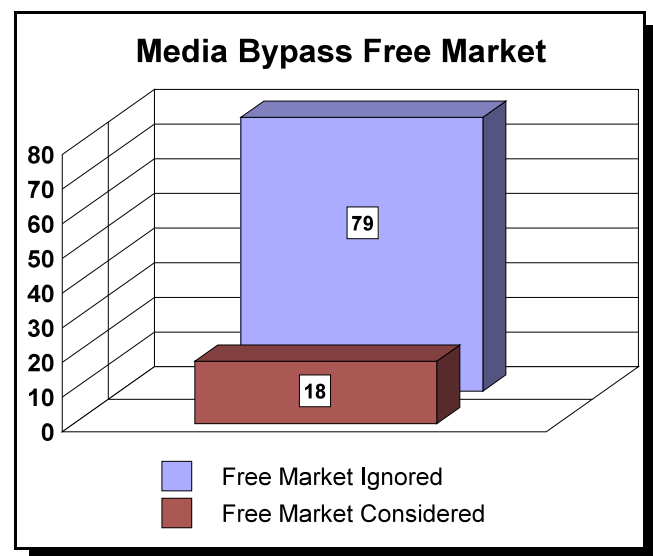
NBC Nightly News’s July 16 show included reporter Robert Hager’s comments about government’s role with the “epidemic of obesity” and how it has “refused to pay, has denied treatment under Medicare unless there were serious complications, like diabetes.”

Hager ended his report with a quote from Bette Anne Duffy who was glad that Medicare was going to consider obesity a disease for her and people like her “who have been frustrated with getting help for their medical conditions related to obesity.” Hager added: “And frustrated by a government that called for a slimmed-down America, without fattened insurance benefits to help pay.”

But the Free Market Was Practically Ignored

Billions of dollars are spent each year on healthier foods – low-carb sodas, low-fat salad dressings and thousands of other products. The food industry has responded with numerous food options since the rise of diets like Atkins and South Beach.

That effort, however, still hasn’t made a significant impact on the media coverage of obesity. Eighteen of 97 stories acknowledged the relevance of our free market economic system. In the other 79 stories, it was no more than an afterthought. This was a huge improvement from our previous study but still amounts to a mere 18 percent of the total. ABC was critical of free market principles. Six of ABC’s 18 stories discussed the free market, but five were dismissive of the concept.



A May 31 *World News Tonight* story discussed how industry was catering to larger Americans. Rather than tell that story, ABC called the entire concept into question. Anchor Elizabeth Vargas introduced the story: "But some wonder whether making life easier for overweight people is always a good thing."

Instead of interviewing overweight customers who were driving this trend, reporter Bob Jamieson went to medical ethicist Arthur Caplan from the University of Pennsylvania. Caplan was concerned about the idea of catering to the needs of overweight people because: "If the world kind of adjusts to your size, perhaps you start to think, this is normal, this is OK."

ABC's John Stossel was a credit to a news outlet that was overwhelmingly hostile toward the free market. His June 18 20/20 piece on Morgan Spurlock's documentary, "Super Size Me," exercised both skepticism and balance. He accomplished that by interviewing a dieter whose McDonald's encounters yielded a different result from Spurlock's. Stossel: "Weaver ate as much as Spurlock did, up to 5,000 calories a day. And how much weight did he gain?" Dieter Chaz Weaver responded: "After the 30 days, I actually lost 8 pounds."

ABC's John Stossel was a credit to a news outlet that was overwhelmingly hostile toward the free market. His June 18 20/20 piece on Morgan Spurlock's documentary, "Super Size Me," exercised both skepticism and balance.

After conducting a fair interview with Spurlock, he offered some criticism: "But this movie implies that this is what has to happen to you at McDonald's. It isn't. If you went to the finest French restaurant and took in 5,000 calories, wouldn't the same thing happen?" The filmmaker replied, "I don't know. Maybe you should make that film."

Too often the print media presented consumers as victims of the whims of malevolent corporations. To *The New York Times's* Jane Brody: "Many food companies are interested in one thing – the most efficient route to extra sales. The more products consumers buy and the more of them they eat, the fatter the companies' coffers. And, alas, the fatter the consumers are likely to be, as well."

In her September 21 article, Brody advised readers to "Beware Food Companies' Health Claims." While she acknowledged that "the concerns and interests of consumers are fickle, and companies are quick to cash in on them," she was upset that "these days, consumers can find on grocery shelves many snacks advertised as low or lower in carbohydrates..." On the surface, Brody suggested it's OK for companies to "fill the

void” as long as they don’t advertise. She qualified her remark by explaining that the FDA hasn’t considered the sugar contents of these products because “there is not sufficient scientific evidence ... that sugar is a risk factor for heart disease.”

In her conclusion, she used an essential catchphrase of the free market as a criticism instead of a solution: “The Food and Drug Administration is currently struggling to come up with regulations for low-carb and reduced-carb claims. Meanwhile, caveat emptor.”

One Stat Fits All?

A major problem in many of the stories we examined was poor or inaccurate use of statistics. The stories rely on what is called a Body Mass Index (BMI) to calculate the prevalence of obesity. The BMI index is based on weight and height. According to the CDC, adults who now have a BMI of 25 or greater are classified as overweight. Those with a BMI of 30 or greater are classified as obese. These requirements were made more stringent in 1998, resulting in millions more Americans being classified as overweight or obese.

With children, it’s a bit different. To accommodate growth spurts and other physical developments, children with BMI values above the 95th percentile of growth charts (based on expert recommendations) are classified as overweight. It’s important to note the CDC doesn’t classify children as obese. To reference “youth obesity” as evidenced by CDC studies is inaccurate. In a May 29 *New York Times* article, Abby Ellin discussed a faith-based weight loss workshop. In her story, she reported “15 percent of whom [children] are obese nationwide.”

The CDC’s statistics are the standard for public health investigations into overweight/obesity. Reports like one issued by the Institute of Medicine of the National Academies (September 2004) rely on the heavy lifting done by the Centers for Disease Control.

The major media couldn’t keep straight how many children are overweight, according to the CDC (16 percent currently). The numbers varied wildly, sometimes even in the same news outlet. Here are a few excerpts from stories that fudge or misinterpret the statistics:

- Sandra Hughes of *CBS Evening News* in an August 19 story: “A world full of fast food, television and video games, a combo platter that’s contributing to soaring obesity rates. Thirty percent of American kids are overweight.”

In particular, *USA Today* couldn't seem to keep the numbers straight:

- In-Sung Yoo in a May 6 *USA Today* piece: "An estimated 20% to 30% of children in the USA are overweight or at risk of becoming so, government figures show."
- Bruce Horovitz in a May 18 piece for *USA Today*: "The move is expected to put extreme pressure on other kid-targeted candymakers in an era when more than 30% of children ages 6 to 11 are overweight, says the American Obesity Association."

Either *USA Today's* Nanci Hellmich or her editors had a shaky grasp of the prevalence of overweight in youths. In her May 12 report: "This latest news may confirm the obvious to some, but it comes at a time when about 20% to 30% of children are overweight or at risk of becoming so." On June 16, she claimed that "16.5% of kids were classified as overweight in 2001-2002 compared with 15% in 1999-2000." But, just two weeks later in a June 29 article, "30% of kids in this country are overweight or at risk of becoming so."

Conclusions

The media's obesity coverage since spring 2003 can be characterized as "one step forward and two steps back." The media continue to place too much blame for obesity on food sellers. Journalists also spend too little time getting the perspective of the food industry, relying instead on the same food industry critics like the Center for Science in the Public Interest and Marion Nestle. Not only did reporters continue to rely on such activists for comment, they rarely made any attempt at making those biases known.

While there was some improvement from the first study to the second, the media have a long way to go before they cover the issue of obesity in a balanced fashion.

Here are a few recommendations for better, less biased coverage in the future:

- Consider the influence of consumer demand on a free market economy. The corporations and small businesses that succeed do so because they have found a way to deliver the goods and services customers desire at competitive prices. Instead of focusing on the purported evils of "greedy corporations," consider how efficiently these producers could deliver "healthy" foods if consumers (regardless of income) desire them.
- Skepticism is a virtue if applied evenly. News organizations must apply the same skepticism to activists that they attach to "advocacy groups funded by the food industry." In the same vein, it is important to give the same credence to corporate representatives like that delegated to academics and nutritionists like Marion Nestle.
- Harness resources to explore both sides of the issue. Because journalists are by nature curious, it's surprising that the obesity stories we studied were not more detailed. Too many of them summarized the "obesity epidemic" as a result of companies feeding an expanding consumer appetite with junk food. Several studies indicate that is not the case. According to Radley Balko of the Cato Institute, "non-diet soda consumption has remained stable for the last 15 years." Rae Pica, author of *Your Active Child*, points out that "an increase in childhood obesity of 20 percent over the last decade (at least one in five American children is currently overweight) has occurred despite a decrease in overall fat consumption and little change in caloric intake." Obviously, there are other factors to consider.

Obesity Resource List

Experts

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Cain is the National Chairman of the Free Market Project and a past-president of the National Restaurant Association. He is a recent candidate for Senate in Georgia and was

the CEO of Godfather's Pizza, Inc. Mr. Cain is the former chairman and president of the Tax Leadership Council, the public educational component of Americans For Fair Taxation. He is an author and frequent speaker on business and economic topics.

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Rae Pica has been a children's movement specialist since 1980. As a member of a task force of the National Association for Sport and Physical Education, Pica helped to create "Active Start," national guidelines for early childhood physical activity.

Organizations

Center for Consumer Freedom

PO Box 27414
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The Center for Consumer Freedom is a nonprofit coalition of restaurants, food companies, and consumers working together to promote personal responsibility and protect consumer choices.

Grocery Manufacturers Association

2401 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
2nd Floor
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Phone: 202.337.9400
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www.gmabrands.com

The Grocery Manufacturers of America (GMA) advances the interests of the food, beverage and consumer products industry on key issues that affect the ability of brand manufacturers to market their products profitably and deliver superior value to the consumer. In addition, they Communicate industry positions to the media and the public on critical industry relations and public policy issues.

National Restaurant Association

1200 17th St., NW
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: 202-331-5900
www.restaurant.org

The National Restaurant Association is the leading business association for the restaurant industry.

Snack Food Association

1711 King Street
Suite One
Alexandria, VA 22314
Phone: 703.836.4500 or 800.628.1334

The Snack Food Association represents snack food manufactures and suppliers. SFA promotes snack sales and represents the industry before the government.

National Soft Drink Association

1101 16th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: 202.463.6732
Fax: 202.463.8277

The National Soft Drink Association is a trade association representing the U.S. companies that produce, market, and distribute non-alcoholic beverages.

Websites**Banzhaf Watch/Frontiers of Freedom**

www.banzhafwatch.com

Banzhaf Watch is a website maintained by Frontiers of Freedom that archives news stories relating to one of the most prominent trial lawyers in America. Banzhaf is the inspiration for the current wave of "obesity lawsuits."