What Makes Obesity OK?

In his 2001 essay “Being Fat Is OK,” Paul Campos, a law professor at the University of Colorado, argues that diet industries are selling lies to overweight Americans. Campos also claims that through these lies, obesity is being presented as an “imaginary disease” that can be cured by simple weight loss (209). In other words, he believes that obesity and health issues have no significant connection, and that it is nearly impossible to lose weight and maintain a tiny waist. However, Campos does not seem to have significant evidence to convince his readers of these assumptions and accusations. For a stronger argument, he should have backed up his controversial claims and assumptions with better cited sources and more outside information. Without this extra support, readers may find it difficult to take his arguments and ideas into consideration.

Campos does cite scholarly sources, such as an essay found in the New England Journal of Medicine. Yet he fails to represent the overall ideas of these journal writers. Campos refers to an article written by Jerome P. Karriser and Marcia Angell, authors of “Editorial: Losing Weight—an Ill-Fated New Year’s Resolution,” when he argues that obesity and health have no direct connection. He uses the ideas of Karriser and Angell, without any mention of their names, in announcing, “the editors of…the New England Journal of Medicine have pointed out, ‘the data linking overweight and death are limited’” (Campos 208).

Although Karriser and Angell’s 2005 essay does say that scientists have not found that the correlation between obesity and death shows a direct causation, they state that the studies do not necessarily mean that being overweight is not potentially harmful to one’s health (53). In other words, the studies can show no correlation, but that does not mean that there is no correlation. Karriser and Angell know that the reality of the situation remains, regardless of the test results. They even admit that being overweight “is correlated with serious health problems, including coronary heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, and a variety of musculoskeletal problems” (53). Karriser and Angell realize that although their research and experiments show that the relationship between weight and health is merely correlation, they cannot conclude that obesity is not a cause of many major health problems. Campos takes these journalists’ ideas out of context and manipulates them to fit his argument, a move that can make his essay less trustworthy.

All of this is not to say that Campos’s essay is completely informal and incorrect. On the one hand, in his defense, he did not write “Being Fat Is OK” as a scholarly essay. Informal writing and a lack of outside information are understandable when writing for an online blog or an article in the Jewish World Review, which is not so much academic as it is journalistic. Campos is expressing his thoughts on the issues of health and obesity, which could easily be correct. On the other hand, however, if Campos wishes to make assumptions that are controversial and prone to debate, then he must be able to defend his ideas using extended outside research. More research could help his argument become more trustworthy. Americans are more likely to believe a statement if two or more people, especially experts in the field, support the idea.

For example, Campos claims that Americans are becoming victims to the lies of a “$50 billion-per-year diet industry” (207). Here, he is making the assumption that the reason these diet companies are making an extreme amount of money is because they are hiding the truth that weight loss is ineffective and cannot work. He also hints that weight loss patrons are wasting their money on a program that is ineffective. This idea could potentially be a decent and well organized argument. However, Campos fails
to back up his claims and does not give any recognition of a counter argument. How do we know that the diet plans offered by specific companies constantly fail? What do the nutrition and dieting companies have to say about this claim? Are Campos’s statistics on the amount of Americans who regain weight reliable? Perhaps if Campos used sources written by experts in the field of weight loss, he would have sufficient evidence to back up these ideas.

For a decent argument, a writer must back up his or her ideas and thoughts with accurate research and reliable sources. Even in informal essays, arguments must be supported with facts along with reasons to believe those facts. A way of writing in which the writer uses resources would not leave the readers thinking that the writer is biased. Instead, they would be much more open to the writer’s thoughts and opinions and would walk away from the essay feeling pleased rather than annoyed. If Campos would apply these extra touches into “Being Fat Is OK,” then his audiences would be able to read the essay with a more open mind.

Works Cited

