

In the articles written by authors Laura Stone, David Morgan, Margaret Munro and the Vancouver Sun, between October 11 to November 27, featured in the Vancouver Sun's online database, where is the blame placed for increasing number of obese individuals?

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In the articles written by authors Laura Stone, David Morgan, Margaret Munro and the Vancouver Sun, between October 11 to November 27, featured in the Vancouver Sun's online database, where is the blame placed for increasing number of obese individuals?

In recent years, the number of obese people in British Columbia has grown. The Vancouver Sun, and the news in general, is able to tell us the cause of the many disasters in our community and with this in mind I searched the Sun's online database for articles discussing the causes of obesity. In the articles I analyzed, the cause of obesity is attributed to numerous entities but responsibility is never placed on the individual. Stone and Morgan's articles blame urban development or inanimate objects for increasing obesity rates. Stone uses agency to direct blame to the city landscape while Morgan uses processes and a comparative conjunction to direct blame to the fast food industry. Munro and the Sun accuse human sources: human nature and parents. Munro unitizes agency; food becomes an agent that can seduce consumers. The Sun begins to tie obesity to the actions of children, but suddenly shifts the responsibility to the parents. At first, the children are agents but quickly the parents become agents and the children become the affected. Though different tactics are used, the message of these four articles is clear: obesity is not to be blamed on yourself. These articles only fuel the problem by encouraging their audience to shunt blame to external sources, never facing the issue themselves.

In this analysis of the Vancouver Sun's articles, I consulted English Grammar: A university Course by Angela Downing and Philip Locke for all grammatical structures. All of the quotations I use in this essay are taken solely from the article mentioned at the beginning of each section. All of the important grammatical structures that I would like to draw attention to are emphasized using bold font.

Laura Stone's article "Urban sprawl no fun for kids, reports say: Children can't gain sense

of independence or get enough exercise in today's cities, they conclude” outlines the harmful effects urban sprawl has on the wellbeing of children, as it decreases physical activity thereby harming their bodies. She notes that communities are spaced out and this creates an issue of decreased physical activity. In sparse communities, children are able to justify receiving a ride by car to places they wish to go, rather than walking. In her article, Stone gives urban sprawl agency.

Agent	Material process	Determiner	Head	Affected
Urban sprawl	has also taken	its	toll	on the bodies and minds of children.

Urban sprawl is the agent in the material process “to take.” Stone has made it appear that “the bodies and minds of children” are affected by urban sprawl, which is merely a concept. The blame is shifted away from the individual to another source. As with the other Vancouver Sun authors, Stone implies that individuals are not to blame for what is happening to their bodies, it is other, external factors.

Stone links obesity with physical activity using a relational process. This is an important correlation as Stone emphasizes that it is urban sprawl that decreases physical activity. By identifying urban sprawl as discouraging physical activity, Stone is able to imply that urban sprawl is a cause of obesity.

Relativizer	Preposition	Compliment	Preposition	Compliment Carrier	Coordinating Conjunction	
Not only	in	terms	of	obesity	and	
Determiner	Head	Preposition	Anaphoric reference	Subject	Connective adjunct	Relational process
this	problem	of	public health	– that,	of course,	is

Modifier		Relational process	Attribute		Coordinating Conjunction
deeply		related	with physical activity		and
Nominal group		Relativizer	Agent	Material process	Circumstantial adjunct
Determiner	Head				
the	fact	that	children	don't walk	as much as before.

The carrier, “obesity,” is later associated, by “related,” with the attribute “physical activity.” The modifier “deeply” increases the strength of the relationship between physical activity and obesity. Stone uses a coordinating conjunction “and” to link physical activity to the dependent clause that states that children do not walk as often as before. This neatly ties all the concepts together. Urban sprawl is related to obesity as it enables children to decrease the amount of physical activity they partake in. The rise of obesity is blamed on an inanimate force, namely urban sprawl.

In David Morgan's report “Menu labeling affects fast food selection, New York study finds: People bought food with lower calorie counts at nine of 13 fast food and coffee chains surveyed” the fast food industry is held responsible for the cause of obesity. In this article, the fast food industry is portrayed as an instigator for obesity as they do not properly inform the consumer about how many calories are in the food they are about to ingest. When one consumes high calories food that cannot be burned off during the day, the extra calories are stored away and this is a direct cause of obesity, a concept expressed by Munro's article below. Morgan is aware of this and stresses that the fast food industry is able to, but does not, help consumers make calorie-saving choices. He uses active mental and material processes to show that diners can make wise health choices if the information is available.

Experiencer Agent	Mental process	Coordinating Conjunction			Material process	Phenomenon Affected
Diners who	saw	and			acted on	calorie information
Material process	Affected Agent	Material process	Modifier	Affected	Modifier	Comparative Conjunction
bought	food	containing	106 fewer	calories	on average	than
Experiencer	Mental process	Phenomenon				
those who	did not notice	the postings.				

The “diners” are the agents in this clause. They are the participants in the active material processes “saw” and “acted on,” which is linked to the affected “calorie information.” This link is significant as it emphasizes the importance of the availability of this information. The agents “bought” food with fewer calories, again stressing the active decision on the part of the agent. The comparative conjunction links the experiencers that saw the calorie information to those that did not. It emphasizes that those who saw the information chose food with fewer calories. Morgan's process types and comparative conjunction allows him to strengthen his argument that fast food chains need to post dietary information. His article points a finger at the institutions for misinforming consumers, once again allowing the individual to blame an external source. The consumers are able to categorize themselves as experiencers who “saw” or “did not notice” the calorie information. This will allow them to see themselves as victims of the fast food industry rather than taking responsibility for researching what they eat. While Stone and Morgan blame external, abstract sources for causing obesity in individuals, Munro and the Sun blame a human source. However, they still encourage the individual to attribute fault to those other than themselves.

Margaret Munro's article, “Diabetes rising: The quiet disease is about to get much louder:

Sedentary lifestyles and poor eating habits are creating a ‘slow-motion emergency,’” identifies human nature as the cause of obesity. In her article, Munro uses a relational process to implicitly blame human nature for obesity.

Identified		Relational Process	Identifier
Determiner	Head		
the	problem	is	human nature.

The relational process “is” clearly links “the problem” to “human nature” through the relationship between the identified and identifier. This gives the reader no doubt about what is to be blamed for obesity. Munro does not place emphasis on the individual's role in causing obesity. In her article, people are featured as the affected of an agent-less material process. This depicts the individual as a victim rather than a participant.

Affected			Material process	Preposition
People			did not evolve	in
Compliment	Relativizer	Affected	Material process	Stance adjunct
a world	where	food	was served up,	often in excess,
Time Adjunct		Verbal process	Modifier	Sayer
several times a day,		says	diabetes specialist Dr.	Hertzel Grestein,
Place Adjunct				
at McMaster University in Hamilton.				

In the above passage, the material process “was served up” has no agent. This process requires a physical being, but there is no one to take responsibility for it. This allows the reader to associate food availability and consumption with an absent force that they are helpless to stop. Munro uses stance and circumstantial adjuncts to emphasize her argument. The stance adjunct “often in excess” leads the reader to associate food with the way it is modified. Munro emphasizes that

there is too much food given to the affected: the people. The time adjunct “several times a day” stresses the repetition of this event. This leads the reader to build a mountain of food in their minds. This large amount of food is given to the affected by the agent-less material process “served up.” Munro combines a modifier and place adjunct to strengthen her statement. The modifier “diabetes specialist Dr.” and place adjunct “at McMaster University” add validity to this scenario.

Later in the article, Munro discusses the challenge posed by our society: exercise versus high calorie foods. In this section, Munro relates people and the task of spending energy, which helps burn calories and increases physical fitness, as a chore.

Circumstantial adjunct	Determiner	Head	Preposition	Compliment	Relativizer	Carrier Agent
Now	the	opposite	is	true,	with	people
Relational process	Attribute				Material process	
having	to go out of their way				to spend	
Affected Agent	Stance adjunct			Material process	Determiner	
energy	- and often money for fitness classes and equipment			to burn off	the	
Modifier	Affected Agent	Stance adjunct				
		Verbal process		Locative Compliment		
calorie-laden	foods	that beckon		from almost every corner.		

The relational process “having” chains the carrier and attribute together. The carrier “people” is linked to an attribute that is laden with colloquial language suggesting that spending energy is tedious. To go out of one's way suggests an unwanted input of effort. This use of language implies that the individual is not at fault for their obesity if it is caused by a lack energy expenditure because burning calories is such an odious task. Munro uses a stance adjunct to

allow her argument to penetrate the reader on a personal level. She adds that people have to spend “money for fitness classes and equipment” in order to burn off excess energy. Members of our society do not wish to spend more money than necessary and Munro uses this tendency to her advantage; she links spending energy to spending money and this will have an adverse effect on readers. Their attitude towards spending energy may be swayed by this adjunct.

In Munro's article, food is an agent. In the above passage, food is the sayer and agent of the seductive verb “beckon.” “Food” is modified with “calorie-laden” to show its saturation and relate it to the reason people must spend energy. Munro uses a locative compliment, “from almost every corner,” to create a sense of space that is permeated with these foods. Food is therefore to blame for obesity, as it is beckoning to be consumed and contains energy that must be expanded through unpleasant, inconvenient and expensive means.

The Vancouver Sun's article, “Battling obesity starts with the young,” discusses the seriousness and cause of childhood obesity. In this article, the growing number of obese children is the central topic, however the Sun does not blame the children themselves for their predicament; the Sun blames the parents instead. The Sun uses relational processes to explicitly label obesity.

Preposition	Modifier	Possessor	Relational process	Possessed	Preposition	Compliment
If	childhood	obesity	had	the status	of	a disease,
Identified	Relational process		Identifier			
it	would be classified as		an epidemic.			

The Sun prepares the reader to receive the explicit status that obesity has; the relational process “had” ties the possessor “obesity” to the possessed “the status.” This relational process allows no question as to what the Sun is referring to – it is clear that is is obesity. The Sun uses a second

relational process to tie obesity to its status of epidemic. Here, The Sun uses an anaphoric reference (Eggins, 35), “it.” The identified “it” refers to obesity, mentioned at the beginning of the sentence. This combination of anaphoric reference and the identified links obesity to the identifier “an epidemic.” The Sun clearly defines the frequency of obesity while also raising urgency in the readers mind. The identifier is a word associated with transmittable diseases and infections. This portrays obesity as a quickly spreading disease that one can catch. This inference is dangerous as it allows the reader to associate becoming obese with an involuntary process.

The Sun suggests a couple of factors that may lead to obesity – poor nutrition coupled with sedentary lifestyles and poor body image. The following passage is the only one I encountered in the body of news texts I analyzed in which those who are obese are also the agents of the actions that led to their condition.

Agent Subject	Material process		Modifier	Affected	Coordinating Conjunction		Material process
Kids	don't eat		enough	fresh food	and		spend
Modifier	Affected	Material process	Affected	Coordinating Conjunction	Material process	Affected	
too much	time	watching	TV	and	playing	video games	

The agent in this clause is “kids.” In the previous clause, The Sun modified “obesity” with “childhood” to make it clear that it was this group of individuals that are obese. In this clause children are agents of the material process “don't eat, spend and watching.” All of these process are modified with a negative attribute that links them to increasing sedentary lifestyles and the poor health that results. The material process “don't eat” is combined with the modifier “enough” and the affected “fresh food,” this directly links children with poor diets – one of the causes of obesity that was previously mentioned. The same is true when the material process “spend” is

linked with the modifier “too much” and the affected “time.” “Watching” is connected with “TV” and both of these process place the children as the agents of actions that reinforce an inactive lifestyle – the second cause of obesity.

The Sun defines a third possible cause of obesity – body satisfaction. The nominal groups found in this passage are reflective of the attempt to scientifically quantify the abstract quality of body satisfaction. It is important that body image is portrayed as a measurable quantity in order for the article to effectively convey the relationship between obesity and an emotional state.

Determiner	Modifier	Head	Verbal process	Nominal group	Preposition	Compliment
A	recent	study	suggests	another predictor	of	obesity:
Modifier	Nominalisation	Agent	Modifier			
body	satisfaction.	Researchers	at the University of Alberta and Harvard University ...			
Material process		Affected Agent	Material process	Affected	Relativizer	Nominal
confirmed		earlier studies	that demonstrated	an association	between	poor
Group		Coordinating conjunction		Nominal group		
Modifier	Head			Modifier	Modifier	head
body	image	and		increasing	body	mass.

In the passage above, “satisfaction” is nominalized and modified by “body.” This shift from verb to noun creates a finite term that makes the measure of “body satisfaction” seem more concrete. The two nominal groups “poor body image” and “increasing body mass” are a reflection of the scientific nature of this passage. The clause states that a study has demonstrated an association between these two nominal groups. The modifiers make “image” and “mass” appear as if they are the x and y axes of a graph. This consolidates a quality, body satisfaction, and a quantity, body mass, in a unifying way that adds validity to the results. This correlation is important as, at

the end of the article, the Sun shifts the blame for obesity to the parents.

At first, the Sun is clear that the children are the agents and thereby the instigators of their own condition. At the end of the article, the agents are no longer the children. The parents are the agents and the children move to the role of affected.

Stance adjunct	Relativizer	it-cleft	Agent	Material process	Affected
Ultimately,	though,	it's up to	parents	to show	children
Material process	Affected	Modifier		Coordinating Conjunction	Material process
how to care for	their bodies	through diet and exercise		and	to help
Affected Experiencer	Mental process	Phenomenon Modifier	Preposition	Affected Compliment	
them	to feel	good	about	themselves.	

The parents are agents of the material processes “to show, to help.” These processes involve assistance from the agent, implying that the affected, “children,” need the parents. The processes the parents are responsible for are linked to the previously mentioned causes of obesity. The it-cleft used, “it's up to” is very important to build contrastive focus (Downing, 250). It stresses that it is the parents, not any others, that are responsible for their children. The modifier “through diet and exercise” relates to the problem of sedentary lifestyles. This is an important addition because it emphasizes that parents are responsible to educate their children about how to care for their bodies. The parents are also the agents of the material process “to help.” They must assist their children to increase their “body satisfaction.” In this clause the children are the affected and are no longer agents. This implies that they are helpless and will not be successful at battling obesity if they have incompetent parents. The blame on someone or something other than the individual is a common theme throughout the articles I analyzed. This article has done the same as it draws

to a close. It shifts the blame from the individual and transfers it to the parents. As they grow into adulthood, the children will have someone to blame if they succumb to obesity.

There is a common trend among the articles: they do not focus on the individual as the one responsible for his or her own obesity. Though the authors utilize different grammatical tactics, it is clear that their articles share a common theme. Whether they give agency to food or other inanimate objects, or shift the blame by allowing the audience to view themselves as the affected, these authors are encouraging a dangerous, victimizing mind set. These authors give the reader a reason to feel confident that their health issues are not their own fault. This trend may reflect the interests of the newspaper itself, as this type of article may sell more copies than those that force the reader to reflect on their own inadequacies. Encouraging individuals, especially children, to blame others for their health problems will hurt those around them as well. The Sun's article shifts blame to the parents by changing agency and will encourage children to, when they grow up, reflect on how it was their father or mother's lack of guidance that lead them down the path to poor health. Diverting focus away from oneself will not break the cycle of poor health. The authors of future articles need to be more conscious of who they assign agency to. The implication of urban sprawl or food as an agent is dangerous as it gives unrealistic power to a concept. It encourages the individual to externalize blame when more pressing personal issues need to be addressed in order to battle obesity.

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