



# BAN THE WORD

The F Word : Fat-shaming

by James Zervios, OAC Vice President of Marketing and Communications

**T**he fight to end fat-shaming always seems to be instantly met with resistance. Just last week, the Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) took on a high-profile issue with the “Dr. Ken” show, starring real life doctor Ken Jeong. Within minutes of TMZ reporting the story, comments such as this began popping up online:

“I do not understand why people get offended enough to feel censorship is warranted. I understand some cannot help weight issues due to certain medical conditions, but there is no reason for them to be offended by comedy.” – Karvey Kardashian (screenname)

“If fat people don’t want to be fat-shamed they should go on a diet and go to the gym. It’s that simple. Obesity should not be accepted.” – Denvermommy (screenname)

“So a joke is what is pushing all these fat people into depression? How about their mirror, their hand to mouth habit, sweets, overeating, lazy- You look at a bus and say ‘It is a bus’ – You look at a fat person and say ‘That is a fat person’- it is what it is- donut get your pants in a wad!” – Shata (screenname)

It seems that the general public has three main areas of concentration when it comes to the majority response to fat-shaming: censorship, personal responsibility and the idea that approaching the subject comically helps people lose weight. Let’s take a moment and examine each one of these areas and see if we can provide some justification for any of them.

## Censorship

As far as we’ve progressed in this country with acceptance and respect, obesity is most certainly last in line for that dose of tolerance. We are so quick as a society to throw the word “censorship” around when it pertains to something that “we” do not approve of, but if you’re on the other side of that coin, you may have a different opinion. Everyone has the right to hateful speech, but people should not be surprised when they become marginalized because of it. As a result, they might find that businesses do not want to give them a stage from which to broadcast their hateful views.

Is what we asked for “censorship” by definition? Sure, it sounds like it to me. And we can still ask for it because what was being said was wrong and unacceptable. Just as the writers of “Dr. Ken” had the freedom of speech to say what they did, we (the OAC) have the same right to say “it’s wrong.” To me, the most obscene form of censorship is when individuals DO NOT speak up for what they believe. To me, that is censorship in its ugliest form.

For decades, other disease groups fought for their rights to be heard, accepted and treated with respect. One comment about the “Dr. Ken” issue said, “If you don’t like what’s on TV, then change the channel.” My response to that is, “If you don’t like what the OAC is asking for, take a moment to educate yourself about obesity and weight bias. You just might change your mind.”

## Personal Responsibility

This is one of my favorite arguments that I've heard throughout the past decade in reaction to obesity.

### "You did it to yourself. You ate too much."

Wow, such a profound statement. Except, it's not THAT simple. I will be the first to say that there definitely is personal responsibility in obesity. However, guess what? There's personal responsibility in everything you do in life. We are responsible for ourselves, and we all have actions that may not be the most responsible thing.

- Did you drive one mile per hour over the speed limit to work today? Maybe your car insurance provider should drop you.
- Did you smoke a cigarette today? Well, maybe your health insurer should deny you respiratory treatment seeing as how you did the damage to yourself.
- Are you reading this at work? Hmm, I wonder if your employer should fire you for not doing your job.
- Did you apply sunscreen before going outside today? I really feel you should pay out-of-pocket for any skin-related health issues you have. It really is your fault.

What do you think of these statements? You know what I think of them? They're all idiotic. They're all just as idiotic as the argument of someone with obesity has done it ALL to themselves. That's right; they may have never gone through an emotional time (divorce, death of a loved-one, loss of employment). They may have never been diagnosed with any other disease that can impact their weight or have taken a medication that caused weight gain. Nope, it never happens. Right, keep telling yourself that.

The cold, hard truth is that I've never met someone who denied all personal responsibility for their weight and health. I know, It's shocking right? Your "personal responsibility" argument is invalid. Want to know why? I'll tell you why. Because people with obesity are personally responsible for their weight. Nobody has ever denied that. They're personally responsible for their weight, health, kids, pets, spouses, employment, car, what they eat, who they talk to, where they go and so on. Guess what? Personal responsibility is one of life's natural occurrences, so if you're going to use it as an argument against our cause, it won't make a difference.

### "Approaching the Subject Comically Helps People Lose Weight"

YES! I love this one. I am going to respond to this one very clearly. Ready? Fat-shaming does not (and never did) help anyone lose weight. While most people think shaming encourages someone to make a change, it actually just causes them to feel worse about themselves and not make a change.

According to the Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity: Obesity-related campaigns that were rated to be stigmatizing were no more likely to instill motivation for improving lifestyle behaviors than campaigns rated as more neutral. In addition, stigmatizing campaigns were also rated as inducing less self-confidence to engage in health behaviors

promoted by campaigns, and viewed to have less appropriate visual content compared to neutral campaigns.

Fat-shaming, whether it's on TV, in a song or said in-person, does absolutely no good in helping someone make a change in their life – period. In fact, studies have shown that it can actually cause people to gain weight.

No other disease is the target of humor in today's pop culture. Throughout time, various topics have become off-limits, for perfectly good reasons, to joke about as comedy. Make no mistake about it; obesity is a serious condition affecting more than 93 million Americans. Heart disease, diabetes, sleep apnea, some cancers, GERD and arthritis are all just some of the diseases related to obesity.

I think it's safe to say that the arguments frequently voiced by the public in regards to obesity and fat-shaming are completely invalid and based on absolutely zero scientific evidence. Some of you may be reading this and think, "He seems angry." Well, I am. I'm angry that I didn't write this sooner. I am frustrated with the comments regarding obesity and fat-shaming. Fat-shaming is wrong, and it needs to stop.

To think that we live in a society where it's okay to make fun of someone because of their size is simply ridiculous. Fat jokes aren't funny. Do we joke about HIV or AIDS? Do we joke about cancer? Do we joke about diabetes? We don't joke about these things because we know that people affected by them wouldn't appreciate it, and it's simply not right.

Some people emailed me asking if "we're serious." The answer is yes, we're very serious, and we're going to keep tackling bias issues until we finally see a day where weight bias and fat-shaming are no more. Now, if you have a problem with that, well, I suggest you not censor yourself, take some personal responsibility and learn more about obesity and weight bias.

#### **About the Author:**

*James Zervios is the Vice President of Marketing and Communications for the Obesity Action Coalition. He has worked for the OAC for more than a decade and is the staff liaison for the OAC Weight Bias and Education Committees.*

## TAKE ACTION!

Raising awareness of this issue on a National level is extremely important. As an OAC member, there are a variety of things you can do RIGHT NOW to help us end fat-shaming:

- Sign the OAC's Petition to Ban the F Word
- Donate to the Ban the F Word Movement
- Share Your Story with Us
- Spread the Word

You can take part in any of these action items by simply visiting [www.BantheFWord.com](http://www.BantheFWord.com) today. The reality is that we cannot end fat-shaming alone. We need your voice to help us raise awareness of this important issue.

# BAN THE F WORD in Action!

The F Word : Fat-shaming



## Stigmatizing Video promoted on KevinMD.com

In July, the OAC was alerted to an online video that perpetuated fat-shaming in the healthcare setting. The OAC alerted all of our Ban the F Word petition signers, and in less than 24 hours, the video was taken down – VICTORY!!! To read more about this issue, please see the OAC in the News section on page 5.

## The Project Harpoon/ Thinner Beauty Movement

In August, the OAC was alerted to a new online movement called "Thinner Beauty," a campaign that digitally edits photos of individuals to make them appear more thin, and later posts the photos online to show a side-by-side comparison. The campaign's Facebook pages were reported online and were later removed from the social media site.

ACTION  
NEEDED!

## Carnival Cruise Line's "Fat Jimmy's C-Side BBQ"

In September the OAC tackled another weight bias issue by reaching out to Carnival Cruise Line and calling for the company to remove the word "fat" from the name of a restaurant on two of their ships, "Fat Jimmy's C-Side BBQ." By using the word "fat" in the restaurant's name they're only further promoting weight bias and stigma in society. Visit [bi.ly/OACBias2](http://bi.ly/OACBias2) to take action!

Want to help the OAC put an end to fat-shaming and weight bias?

Join the fight.  
Sign the petition.

Visit [www.BantheFWord.com](http://www.BantheFWord.com) to learn more.



## ABC Network's "Dr. Ken" Television Show

In September, the OAC spoke out against the pilot for a newly created television series on the ABC Television Network, "Dr. Ken." In the promotional trailer, Dr. Ken (played by real-life doctor Ken Jeong) stigmatizes one of his patients affected by obesity. Ken Jeong informed the OAC via Twitter that the content has been removed from the show, and the promotional trailer was set to private on ABC's YouTube account.

# OAC Membership Application

## Why Join the OAC?

The OAC is a nearly 50,000 member-strong 501(c)(3) National non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to the individual affected by the disease of obesity and helping individuals along their journey toward better health through education, advocacy and support. Our core focuses are to raise awareness and improve access to the prevention and treatment of obesity, provide evidence-based education on obesity and its treatments, fight to eliminate weight bias and discrimination, elevate the conversation of weight and its impact on health and offer a community of support for the individual affected.

## 1. OAC Membership Categories (select one)

- Individual Membership: \$20/year
- Institutional Membership: \$500/year
- Chairman's Council Membership: \$1000+/year

Are you joining for the first time, or are you renewing your OAC Membership?

- I am joining for the first time (never been an OAC member).
- I am renewing my membership (have joined the OAC in the past).

## 2. Donation Add-on

### Add-on Donation: Make a General Donation

Make a tax-deductible donation to the OAC when joining as a member. Your donation helps the OAC's educational and advocacy efforts.

- \$5                    \$50
- \$10                \$100
- \$25                Other \_\_\_\_\_

## 3. Membership/Donation Add-on Totals:

Membership Fee: +\$ \_\_\_\_\_

Donation Add-on (optional): +\$ \_\_\_\_\_

**TOTAL PAYMENT:** \$ \_\_\_\_\_

## Payment Information

Check (payable to the OAC) for \$\_\_\_\_\_.

Credit card for my TOTAL, including add-ons, of \$\_\_\_\_\_.

- Discover®
- MasterCard®
- Visa®
- Amex®

Credit Card Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Expiration Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Billing Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

CV Code: \_\_\_\_\_

## Contact Information

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

**JOIN ONLINE!** To join the OAC online, please visit [www.ObesityAction.org](http://www.ObesityAction.org) and click on the "Get Involved" tab.

Mail: OAC

4511 North Himes Ave. Ste. 250  
Tampa, FL 33614

Fax: (813) 873-7838

MagMembership-Spring2015



# BUILDING A COALITION OF THOSE AFFECTED

The OAC is the **ONLY** non-profit organization whose sole focus is helping those affected by obesity. The OAC is a great place to turn if you are looking for a way to get involved and give back to the cause of obesity.

## Why YOU Should Become an OAC Member

Quite simply, because the voice of those affected needs to be built! The OAC not only provides valuable public education on obesity, but we also conduct a variety of advocacy efforts. With advocacy, our voice must be strong. And, member is what gives the OAC its strong voice.

## BENEFITS TO INDIVIDUAL MEMBERSHIP



- Official welcome letter and membership card
- Annual subscription to the OAC's publication, *Your Weight Matters<sup>SM</sup> Magazine*
- Subscriptions to the OAC Members Make a Difference and Obesity Action Alert monthly e-newsletters
- "Bias Buster" Alerts, alerting specifically to issues of weight bias
- Immediate Advocacy Alerts on urgent advocacy issues and access to the OAC's expert advocacy team
- Ability to lend your voice to the cause

MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS