

## **Section One: The Growing Global Trend of Obesity**

Obesity has become a trend that has swept over every region of the globe. Its intensity varies from country to country, but has no bias as to whom it affects. No longer solely an American concern, obesity's prevalence has been growing over time. The World Health Organization has even gone as far as calling the problem a global epidemic (One Billion People Overweight). Obesity has grown in both its scope and pace, largely due to factors such as changes in eating habits, culture, advancements in technology and household income. Changes in lifestyles have led people to become overweight or obese in almost every country around the world, ultimately becoming a global trend, as well as a global concern.

Tony Barnett, head of the diabetes and obesity group at Birmingham University states, "I think we are seeing obesity in virtually every country in the world. Interestingly enough, it's not just the developed world, but increasingly it's the developing world as well" (Randerson). The initial emergence of obesity came from the United States, most likely due to a number of factors including our increasingly sedentary lifestyles. Up until the early 1980's, the size of the average American body had remained fairly constant, "growing by just a third of a pound between 1962 and 1980" (Crawford). Unfortunately, throughout the next couple years, a number of societal trends in the US began to shift. Portions began increasing, people cooked less at home and a wider selection of fast, cheap and convenient foods became available (Crawford). Today, "Government statistics show that more than 60 million Americans already quantify as obese, up from 23 million in 1980. Another 28 million are expected to join their ranks by 2013" (Crawford). The conception of obesity still remains an American stigma today

However, the trend of obesity began slowly trickling into Europe in the late eighties and early nineties. In 2000, Britain was catching up with the United States showing similar obesity numbers as the U.S had a decade earlier (Josling). Next in line was Germany, followed by almost every other European country. Obesity didn't stop in Europe, though. It continued on into Asia, significantly impacting China and most recently Japan (One Billion People Overweight). At present, obesity has become a problem in developing countries, predominantly India, as well as island nations such as Nauru, where an estimated 70% of inhabitants are currently obese (Ford). In summation, an increase in obesity was evident in every single country where it has been studied; including other areas such as Australia, Sweden, Austria, Denmark, Finland, Egypt, and Chile, just to name a few (Lehman). Obesity is clearly a significant global trend, affecting people across the world.

There are many assumptions as to why the trend of obesity has become so ubiquitous around the globe. Cultural changes, economics and technology, have all contributed to this growing trend in one way or another. One particular driving force of this trend has been an ongoing "westernization" of diets (Ford). American culture is famous for its fast and inexpensive foods, rich in sugar, salt and fat. These types of fast-foods have become increasingly popular in other parts of the world, such as India and China, due to the recent emergence of the "McWorld" trend. In China particularly, animal fat intake has tripled in the past 20 years (Saletan). Furthermore, statistics say that "by 2020, meat consumption in developing countries will grow by 106 million metric tons" (Saletan). In fact, half of McDonald's business is outside the United States (Saletan). This has in turn created a sort of "nutritional transition" for societies that have drifted away from their more traditional foods, which were more time consuming to prepare and more costly to purchase, towards more mass-produced, convenience foods (Eberwine). These types of fast-foods are much higher in fat and calories and significantly lower in nutritional value important for healthy diets. This

nutritional transition has directly been linked to the increase of obesity almost everywhere (Saletan).

A second driving force of the obesity trend relates to economics and household income. In general, fresh meats and vegetables tend to be more costly than a burger and fries to go. This leads lower income individuals and families to gravitate towards the less-expensive, more for your money, fast-foods (Eberwine). In the article *Please Don't Feed the People*, it was stated that "For middle and high income Americans, the obesity rate is 29%. For low income Americans, it's 35%" (Saletan). This leads us to believe Americans within a lower income bracket are eating more unhealthy foods. However, the same article states that globally, weight has tended to rise with income (Saletan). For example, the Chinese culture maintains the historical mentality that excess body fat symbolizes both prosperity and health (Randerson). In summary, discrimination of individuals in any income bracket is absent when linked to factors leading to obesity. Obesity affects all people, with both low and high income families tending to spend more money on unhealthy foods, thus leading to an increase in weight gain (Saletan).

Advancements in technology have also contributed to this global trend of obesity. For example, the "evolution of the modern metropolis" has created an environment in which "patterns of work, transportation and leisure, have people around the globe leading less active, more sedentary lives" (Eberwine). For example, increased automobile usage has significantly cut back on physical exercise that used to be obtained from walking or bike riding. There are 20 million cars on the road presently, compared to the 6 million in 2000 (Randerson). Furthermore, "before technology, adult men expended about 3,000 calories a day, whereas today they only average around 2,000" (Randerson). In China specifically, almost every single person owns a television set, and one in seven Chinese has a motorized vehicle (Randerson). In fact, households which own these vehicles have an obesity rate 80%

higher than those who do not (Randerson). It is evident that the advancements in technology are directly linked to increases in obesity.

Lastly, more men and women around the world are working outside the home. Due to the long hours spent at the office, convenience has become a key factor in daily lives. With both parents at work all day, there is less time to prepare healthy meals for the family (Josling). Moreover, independence has been given to these children after school; leading to the majority of time being spent in front of a television. As a result, a large increase in childhood obesity has occurred. For example, 34% of German children under the age of 14 are overweight, and 8% were titled clinically obese (Germany Announces Plans). According to the German Consumer Affairs Minister Renate Kunast, “the increase in obesity in German children is due to two factors: the soaring growth of the fast-food industry over the past 20 years, and a lack of exercise resulting from the increase in computers and television sets in the home” (Germany Tackles Growing Girth Issue).

In response to the obesity trend, many organizations around the world have felt the need to intervene and attempt to reverse this health dilemma. Obesity is a concern for many reasons, but most importantly the health issues that stem from the weight gain. For example, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, arthritis and kidney disease, all cost governments billions of dollars in health care (Eberwine). One organization fighting to reverse this trend on a global scale is the World Health Organization. The WHO is responding by attempting “to persuade and help governments set policies on diets, physical activity, and health” (Ford). They hope that they can work with the food industry in an effort to cut back on saturated fats, trans-fatty acids, salt and sugar in its products. Clearer labeling on the products themselves is another goal (Ford). One possible solution that the WHO has come up with to reverse the trend is a possible “twinkie tax” or “fat tax” (Ford). This type of taxing on unhealthy foods would hopefully discourage unfavorable eating habits, as well as regulate the advertising and

marketing of unhealthy foods to consumers, particularly children (Ford). What's more, the WHO would then use the revenues from these taxes toward a sort of “counter-advertising, or subsidies on healthier foods” (Eberwine). In the article *The Crisis of Growing Proportions*, it was stated that “Supporters cite studies showing that people will opt for healthier foods over unhealthy ones when the price differential is significant” (Eberwine).

Arguably, the sugar producers say there is no evidence to support the fact that these ingredients in foods contribute to the obesity trend. Riaz Khan, head of the World Sugar Research Organization, wrote in a letter to the WHO that “their report does not meet expected modern standards for a scientific review and these actions would have serious, detrimental and long-lasting effects on the agriculture and the economy of those countries” (Ford). However, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) believes the impact on sugar producers would be minor. Changes such as these would take awhile to implement, and many areas would benefit from these changes, specifically developing countries in the tropics (Ford). “The increase in fruit and vegetable consumption that the WHO wants to recommend, would constitute a major export opportunity” (Ford).

In conclusion, obesity is clearly a global trend affecting people everywhere. It has inspired industries to take action against a disease due to our own incompetence, and created a health concern that goes far beyond being fat. In the end, it is up to individuals to take action and once again make a shift in a lifestyle we have become so comfortable with.

## **Section 2: Case Study Obesity in Germany & its Implications on the Apparel Industry**

As the trend of obesity sweeps through regions around the world, numerous countries are beginning to feel its aftermath. Germany is one particular country in which the obesity trend is escalating rapidly. As of 2005, on average, 70% of men and 50% of women were overweight or obese (Mensink). This growing trend has had an impact on many German industries, particularly the German fashion industry. As the German public continues to increase in size, appropriate plus-size apparel needs to be readily available to accommodate the demanding market. The increasing waistlines of German men and women, due to factors such as culture, technology and shifts in eating behaviors, have led to a profitable new market in the German fashion industry of plus-size apparel.

In a 1986 study by the World Health Organization, German men and women between the ages of 25 and 69 had a 16.2% prevalence of obesity. The same study was taken again in 2003, with results of a 66.5% prevalence of obesity (Germany:Report). Specifically in Germany, lifestyle changes have occurred in the past twenty years to accommodate this obesity trend. Historically, Germany is famous for its traditionally heavy meals, including thick sausages and meat dishes, accompanied with a tower of potatoes. Today, not much has changed. However, Germany is still seeing a significant increase in obesity among its citizens. This is due to a few different factors. For example, the fast food industry's growth in Germany has soared, combined with a considerable decrease in exercise (Germany Tackles Growing Girth Issues). The fat and calories that are being consumed by both the traditional German meals, in addition to the recent increase in fast-food options, are not being burned off as they once were. This is due in

part by Germany's increasingly sedentary lifestyles. Computers and television sets have become more common in German homes, particularly in the past 20 years (Germany Tackles Growing Girth Issues). Men, women and children are not as active as they once were, and are spending more and more time inside the home.

Additionally, many countries find it important to watch their calorie intake and overall food consumption. Particularly in the United States, the idea of dieting and watching what you eat has become a trendy phenomenon. However, in German culture, dieting is more commonly stigmatized as unhealthy (Germans Don't Do). In fact, the European Union recently created a campaign called *TalkingFood*, in hopes to increase nutritional awareness among Germans (Germans Don't Do). Due to the fact that food labels do not give sufficient information in German grocery stores, including contained carbohydrates, eating healthy in Germany is more difficult (Germans Don't Do). While other areas are attempting to decrease the prevalence of obesity by dieting and weight-watching, Germans are still very unaware of how to manage their eating habits. In combination with their increasing sedentary lifestyles, obesity levels continue to rise and rise.

These lifestyle changes have resulted in a demand for fashionable clothing, which caters to a growing population of overweight and obese individuals. The obesity trend in Germany has opened up a new market for domestic retailers, as well as foreign retailers looking to expand globally. With 82.5 million inhabitants, Germany has the largest apparel market in all of Europe. Likewise, Germany presents the largest apparel trade shows in the entire world (US Women's Plus-Size Apparel). Economically, the plus-size apparel industry in Germany is profitable and contributes to a large portion of total GDP

for apparel (US Women's Plus-Size Apparel). Current studies by retail experts found that "at retail, Germany's apparel market has a turnover of about \$60 billion dollars, of which approximately 52% was for women's clothing, or \$31.2 billion dollars" (U.S. Women's Plus-Size Apparel). More specifically, the share for plus-size clothing was around 29% of the woman's apparel market. Translated into dollar figures, that is an estimated \$9 billion dollars exclusively from plus-size apparel (U.S. Women's Plus-Size Apparel). These statistics present a lucrative industry in Germany, with enormous room for growth.

A demand has now arisen for a wider selection of plus-size apparel for German men and women. With 29% of the apparel market already consumed by plus-sizes, new retailers and designers are beginning to take advantage of this opportunity (U.S. Women's Plus-Size Apparel). Women who are plus-size are dissatisfied wearing clothing that is ill-fitted and unfashionable. These women want to have options just like everyone else and find clothing that flatters their body type, yet still remains trendy (Women's Plus Size Apparel Trade Mission to Europe). In 2005, The Commerce Department's Office of Textiles and Apparel and the U.S. Commercial Service, began to answer the calls of these demanding consumers. The Women's Plus-Size Apparel Trade Mission to Europe was sponsored by these companies in order to attract U.S. manufacturers and suppliers of women's plus-size apparel to the German market. This presented "U.S suppliers of fashionable women's plus-size clothing an excellent opportunity to expand market share in this growing segment in Germany" (U.S. Women's Plus Size Apparel). The mission resulted in many U.S. manufacturers and suppliers exporting plus-size apparel into Germany. Unfortunately, manufacturer and supplier participant names were not disclosed.

In addition to foreign apparel expanding into the German market, domestic retailers have taken advantage of this trend as well. One particular retailer who noticed this growing trend over 30 years ago is Ulla Popkin. By incorporating current trends in the European fashion industry, Popkin focuses on “quality, high fashion for plus-size women, specializing in sizes 12-38” (About Us). The retailer has since created an immensely successful business in the German plus-size clothing market, most comparable to the U.S plus-size clothing company, Lane Bryant (About Us). Ulla Popkin initially catered only to this market in Germany, but eventually spread throughout Europe as obesity began to become more widespread. In April of 1994, Ulla Popkin opened its first store in the United States in Baltimore, Maryland (About Us). The plus-size retailer now has over 300 stores in Austria, Switzerland, Holland and Germany, as well as over 200 stores in the United States, Canada and Puerto Rico (About Us). Ulla Popkin recognized that Germans were getting bigger and responded accordingly with fashionable plus-size clothing that is both trendy and affordable.

Adults are not the only people contagious to the obesity epidemic, however. German children are also in need of appropriate plus-size apparel. “One in every three kids is classified as overweight in Germany, while every thirteenth is obese” (Big on Fashion). Unfortunately, the apparel industry has only begun to accommodate the arena of children’s plus-size clothing. A company by the name of Neckermann has recently jumped on the plus-size apparel wagon in order to assist this niche market. Neckermann is a mail-order German firm, which initially only specialized in plus-size apparel for men and women. In 2005, the company introduced the country’s first plus-size catalog for overweight kids (Big on Fashion). A spokeswoman for Neckermann explained that “The

problem is that parents of heavy children often buy cloths that are three-sizes too big and the cloths don't fit properly because the proportions are all wrong" (Big on Fashion). Companies such as Neckermann are coming to the realization that the new "XXL nation" is spanning beyond adults and is now affecting children (Big on Fashion). In response to the increasing number of obese children in this country, the German Consumer Minister Renate Kuenast announced plans for an intervention in Germany's school systems in hopes to begin reversing this trend. Kuenast stated that 34% of all children age 14 and under weighed too much for their body measurements (Germany Announces). Kuenast stated that she "envisioned a coalition of volunteer efforts by the food industry, television advertisers, school administrators and nutritionists to reshape the way young Germans ate" (Germany Announces). As the appearance of obesity becomes more prevalent among children, German retailers are beginning to expand their plus-size options to the younger generations.

The prevalence of obesity in Germany is one of the highest in Europe today. In turn, the impact on the German apparel industry has been positive, allowing established retailers to expand and new ones to emerge. Germany has effectively dealt with this growing trend and shaped a new and profitable market of plus-size apparel for men, women and children alike.

### **Section Three: Obesity and its Implications on the Apparel Industry Worldwide**

Fresh opportunities have arisen for plus-size apparel industries not only in Germany, but all over the world. As a global trend, obesity has taken even the most underdeveloped and remote regions under its wing. It is no longer a stigma directed at Americans, but a generalization of what modern lifestyles have contributed. Due to the fact that almost every single country has been affected by the obesity epidemic, the plus-size apparel industry has flourished as a result. Obesity was even listed as one of the apparel industries top seven mega trends for 2006 (Baker). In particular, the apparel industries in India, China and the UK, have all reaped the benefits gained from the worlds growing waistlines and acquired a new, thriving plus-size market. Each individual country has expanded their own apparel market in order to make room for the plus-size customer. In turn, each has entered into a prosperous niche market.

China is a good example of how the obesity trend is affecting the plus-size apparel industry in Aisa. Chinese culture has changed due to “an increasingly affluent lifestyle, with a meatier diet, increased car use and less exercise” (Randerson). Unlike Germany, historical ideals associating plumpness with prosperity are still very evident, and leave a stigma on being thin (Randerson). Parents are pushing their children to eat more, unaware of the reproductions related to ones health.

This has opened doors for Chinese designers and retailers looking to enter or expand in the apparel market. Plus-size retailer Beijing Pangpangshow recognized this growing demand in China and in 1997 opened its first plus-size clothing store for women in Beijing (China’s Plus Size Fashion Industry Promoted). Yang Fengjun, one of the owners of Beijing Pangpangshow exclaims, “Clothing options for plus-size women have been limited in China,

but demand for a better selection is increasing as waistlines continue to expand” (China’s Plus-Size Fashion Industry Promoted). Beijing Pangpangshow’s success continued to grow along with Chinese women, and the retailer now has six outlets in Beijing, along with 200 franchisees and retailers throughout China” (China’s Plus-Size Fashion Industry Promoted). Awareness and interest of the plus-size market in China has increased, and for the first time ever, plus-size clothing was welcomed onto the runway at China’s 14<sup>th</sup> International Clothing & Accessories fair in Beijing, in April of 2006 (China’s Plus-Size Fashion Industry Promoted). Being the largest fashion show in Asia, the plus-size market had successfully entered the Chinese fashion industry.

The apparel industry in India has begun to expand into the plus-size market as well. “A recent study taken by the All India Institute of Medical Sciences showed that 43% of the 35,000 people surveyed in 10 industrial cities including Bangalore, Coimbatore, Delhi and Dibrugarh were overweight or obese” (Guha). Unlike Germany, India has really just begun to experience this affluent lifestyle, where an increase in purchasing power and multiple options have led to a destructive lifestyle (Bobb). “The sudden availability of calorie charged goodies and the mushrooming of restaurants and cafes serving global cuisine, led to an unhealthy trend” (Bobb). In addition, India shares similar beliefs to those of China, where plumpness corresponds to success. Obesity rates began to soar.

This new market of plus-size people in India has spurred new designers, led to the openings of many new stores and resulted in the expansion of already established apparel retailers. One particular retailer that has opened its doors specifically to India’s plus-size consumer is Pantaloons. This store has been very successful and has two locations in Mumbai, with one opening in Calcutta soon (Guha). Furthermore, the demand for plus-size apparel in India is so high, that retailers already established in the industry are beginning to branch out to this new plus-size customer as well. Shoppers Stop is a store which has existed

in India for over a decade (Nair). Having never serviced the plus-size market before, it created a line in 2005 (Nair). Design head Manish Kelshikar commented on the business in the *Indian Express Newspaper* article, “When Big Is Indeed Beautiful” that “we have a huge customer base and loyalty too, and expect to enhance and enlarge the outfits for this category” (Nair). The plus-size industry in India is even becoming somewhat “couture,” where designers create made to order garments for larger customers (Nair). Fashion designer Anita Dongre is one particular designer who caters exclusively to plus-size women. In 2001 she created AND, a plus-size designer label that went up to size 16. The AND label now goes up to size 20. “That is because of the demand,” Anita Dongre states (Nair). She designs cloths for customers who are too big to shop in regular stores, but want designer cloths that fit right. “AND is available in two outlets in Mumbai and Bangalore and will open in Hyderabad, Surat and Vadodara soon” (Nair). The Indian apparel industry is clearly responding positively to this growing trend of obesity among its consumers.

Lastly, the obesity trend has also impacted the apparel industry in the UK. At present, 63% of men and 54% of women are classified as overweight or obese (UK: Plus-Size Women). Particularly between 1972 and 1990, before both China and India, Britain showed a twofold increase in weight among all age groups of men and women (Josling). Dr. Susan Jebb, head of obesity research at the Medical Research Council in Great Britain, states “Obesity in Britain has reached the levels experienced in the US 12-15 years ago. Britain is rapidly closing the gap” (Josling). Britain now has the potential to even replace Germany as Europe’s most overweight nation (Josling).

In response to this growing obesity trend, the plus-size apparel market in the UK has begun to follow. In June of 2006, the UK held its very first show specializing in fashion and accessories for plus-size women (UK: Fashion Event). The show was titled WomenXL, and “provided major opportunities for high street and specialist retailers to reach a major section

of the market” (UK: Fashion Event). The show was successful and has led to established retailers “adapting their standard ranges to take account of the fact that women are becoming larger” (Larger Women Still). Resizing the ranges of clothing lines has become popular in the UK; with a size 12 now being what a size 14 or 16 used to be. This is also known as ‘ego-sizing’ or ‘vanity-sizing’ (Larger Women Still). In addition, retailers have taken advantage of this growing market and added lines for plus-size customers. For example, Next and Dorothy Perkins are retailers who have begun to accommodate the plus-size market, as well plus-size specialist Evans, who caters exclusively to larger women (Larger Women Still).

“The Market for plus-size fashion in the UK is influenced by a number of factors, including the fact that the population is getting both older and larger- the latter being due to a combination of demographic and lifestyle factors, including lack of exercise in daily life and changing eating habits” (Larger Women Still). The UK and Germany are similar in this aspect. Both countries eating habits have shifted due to the introduction of fast, cheap and convenient foods, as well as a decrease in the amount of disposable time for physical activities.

As the obesity trend continues to grow around the world, changes in the fashion industry will accommodate accordingly. I feel strongly that the fashion industry will successfully manage future dilemmas and challenges related to the obesity trend. Designs, fabrics, silhouettes and styles, will continuously become more sophisticated in order to meet demands from plus-size consumers. Designers, manufacturers and retailers will become more knowledgeable on issues such as sizing and proper fit for the customer, as plus-size apparel begins to saturate the marketplace. For example, a technology based company called FitMe is currently working on the issue of sizing. FitMe is a “powerful web-based software application, which allows individual consumers to determine their fit and optimal sizes across hundreds of brands of clothing” (The Virtual World). This technology is an effort to easily

serve customers of every body type and size, including plus-sizes, as well as petite and other special needs groups (The Virtual World). This is just one way that the apparel industry is preparing for this trend.

Because demand is growing so quickly, it is becoming increasingly important to raise awareness of the options available. This has led to changes in the fashion industry already. The plus-size model has become more common and has recently caused a stir in the world of high fashion. “The fashion industry is still really snobby. There are only a handful of designers who have used big women for their shows. It’s still pretty closed,” exclaims Johanna Dray, one of France’s first plus-size models (Bryant.) Couture designers such as Jean Paul Gaultier and John Galliano, have set the stage for using plus-size models in their shows (Bryant). In addition, Designer Elena Miro, a staple on Milan’s fashion calendar, sent a number of size 14 and 16 girls down the catwalk at this years fashion week (McMahon). Germany has even shifted away from waif-like models due to its high population of bigger women. “We’re seeing healthier-looking models in Germany. It’s a little odd to have these pale, skinny girls---toatally flat, with no butts,” states German model agency owner Wolf Lueck (Bryant).

In conclusion, plus-size apparel industries have truly taken advantage of the global trend of obesity, specifically in China, India and the UK. Due to the growing awareness of this trend, shifts in the fashion world have tagged along. Obesity and plus-size apparel have a positive relationship, one growing with the other. As other men, women and children around the world succumb to an overweight lifestyle, there will no doubt be enough clothing to accommodate them.

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