

Mrs. Kirby

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Schwartz Critique Final Draft

In his essay “Fat and Happy?” historian Hillel Schwartz examines the extent to which fat people are stigmatized and proposes a satirical new community—a fat utopia—as refuge for those who face prejudice. The author claims fat people are misunderstood and unfairly punished for their weight; however, due to his use of loaded language and lack of citation for evidence, Schwartz’s credibility is compromised and his use of satire is lost on the audience.

Schwartz introduces his essay with an explanation for scrutinizing diets, asserting fat people are stigmatized as failures, cannibals, and criminals. Furthermore, the author illustrates how dieting can affect a fat person, stating a large percentage of people will instead reach a plateau body weight, and claims dieting only upsets this balance. He subsequently argues that, as minorities, fat people are ridiculed for eating even in their own home and are discriminated against in public places. Labeling fat people as victims, Schwartz demands a change of perspective from physicians, asserting there is a lack of evidence that proves obesity is an early death sentence. The author then chastises society for creating the negative connotation surrounding fat people while simultaneously utilizing satire to project his idea of a fat utopian society. He insists this ideal community would expel all judgment and competition; thus, his society would empower all fat people and encourage self-confidence. In concluding his essay, Schwartz maintains his argument that dieting is cannibalism and bans the notion from his satirical society.

Schwartz initiates his essay with the statement “Fatness is fine” (179). This is an equivocation fallacy, as there are numerous meanings to the word “fine,” such as “acceptable,” “okay,” or “physically attractive.” Moreover, the author exposes his underlying assumption that the reader can identify his meaning of “fine;” in contrast, Schwartz provides limited context as to his definition of “fine” and the lack of an operational definition negatively affects the clarity of his opening paragraph. Consequently, this prohibits the audience from clearly understanding Schwartz’s perspective on obesity and its role in society. Due to his ambiguous opening statement, the audience is given reign to question Schwartz’s argument and purpose.

In analyzing his writing style, Schwartz favors the short sentence. Regardless, he does vary sentence length, typically utilizing the long sentence as a list for compiling adjectives to describe assets of a fat person in society or as an extended metaphor. One example is found on page 181, where he proclaims “...fat people are seen as throwbacks to a more primitive time. Neanderthals in museum dioramas are squat and fat...Oriental despots are fat; harems are full of slothful fat women and supervised by fat eunuchs.” The author maintains his argument that fat people are minorities stigmatized for their weight. Without a cited source, these claims are an exaggerated analogy and categorized as a loaded language argument, as he solely pulls examples from history that will support his argument, ignoring evidence that, historically, fatter people were considered healthy and affluent. Likewise, Schwartz uses loaded language when he defines dieting as cannibalism and applies words such as “criminals,” “failure,” “genocide,” and “suicide” (185). These words may provoke harsh emotions in his audience and sway their opinion specifically through pathos, which is a red herring fallacy. Rather than addressing the issue he is confronting, fat people and their negative role in society, Schwartz distracts his audience by strong words with emotionally charged meanings.

Although an audience can usually appreciate satirical humor—such as “A Modest Proposal” by Jonathan Swift—Schwartz’s satirical society is lost in his use of extended metaphors and loaded language. A reader would find the author’s satire difficult to identify, as he builds a preceding pattern of employing statistics without evidence. A fat utopia rid of judgment and competition would seem an unreasonable claim, yet Schwartz did previously refer to dieting as “cannibalism” (184-185). In spite of his humor, the author’s balance between logical argument and satirical community is skewed by his use of loaded language, such as cannibalism. When one threatens the idea of cannibalism, it is difficult for another to disengage their mindset from one of inhumane behavior to one of a logical argument with a specific purpose.

Schwartz loses credibility by citing statistics without a source and using loaded language to appeal to his reader: if the reader is knowledgeable on logical fallacies, he/she will see through Schwartz’s techniques to persuade his audience without strong evidence. In addition, because much of the logos Schwartz uses lacks citation, this prompts the audience to question the extent of his research and reliability. Furthering doubt in his argument, the audience’s ability to differentiate Schwartz’s logical argument from his satirical society is hindered due to his previous comparison between weight-loss and genocide (183). Consequently, rather than appearing as a knowledgeable author and innovative thinker, Schwartz appears as an opinionated citizen who may need to conduct further research to adequately support his claim.

Schwartz, Hillel. "Fat and Happy?" *Writing and Reading for ACP Composition*. 2nd ed.

Compilers, Christine R. Farris and Deanna M. Jessup. Boston: Pearson Learning

Solutions, 2013. 179-186. Print.