**Understanding America’s Insulin Crisis**

Avonlea Cummings

April 25, 2023

Diabetes is a disease that has been impacting the lives of Americans for centuries. As of today, nearly 27 million adults have been diagnosed with diabetes and about a quarter of those millions need insulin to survive. Diabetes has two different diagnoses, type I diabetes and type II diabetes.

 Type one diabetes is a genetic diagnosis when the patient’s immune system destroys the cells in the pancreas, diminishing ways to produce enough insulin for the body.  Based on lifestyle choices, patients can be diagnosed with type two diabetes, which is when a patient’s cells become resistant to insulin, and therefore, causing the body to not be able to produce enough insulin to regulate the patient’s glucose levels.

Patients who depend on insulin are typically prescribed at least one vial or insulin pen each month; although, the prices of insulin have skyrocketed over 700% in the past two decades. (Hansen, 2020). In recent years, the media have taken notice of the three major insulin providers Eli Lilly, Novo Nordisk, and Sanofi. These major companies across the world own around 90% of the insulin market, innovating new patents and formulations of insulin, making it difficult for other companies to produce inexpensive insulin.

Countless forms of media outlets have uncovered the detrimental insulin crisis to the public with varying versions of the severity of the crisis. This rhetorical analysis will analyze three media artifacts surrounding the insulin crisis in America through Narrative Criticism.

The three media artifacts analyzed will be an Eli Lilly press release, *Lilly Cuts Insulin Prices by 70% and Caps Patient Insulin Out-of-Pocket Costs at $35 a Month*, the Human Rights Watch journalistic article and report, *If I Run Out of Insulin, I’m Going to Die*, and a Ted Talk spoken by Connor Behr, *An Idea for the Insulin Cost Crisis for Type One Diabetics*. This essay will be taking these three media artifacts to answer the question: How do the popular media narratives around healthcare shape our understanding of the insulin crisis?

**History**

 The history of insulin dates back to 1921 when it was first created by Fredrick Banting who sold the patent for one dollar to the University of Toronto on January 23, 1923 (Hanson, 2020). Since then, Eli Lilly an American insulin company produced the first insulin vial of Humulin to be approved by the FDA (Hanson, 2020). As of now, the prices of insulin have more than tripled. America has the highest cost of insulin averaging around $98 a month as of March 2023, this is the lowest average cost in years, though still pricey. Although, countries like Canada have the average monthly vial cost down to $12. It has been impacting American families battling diabetes to the point of facing difficult decisions of paying for rent or paying for the medicine to keep them alive. Media outlets have made the devastating reality of the insulin crisis more public in recent years as states have begun to litigate these top three insulin companies.

**Description**

To begin, these media artifacts need to be described and meet the needs of a narrative to pursue the narrative criticism of rhetorical analysis. These artifacts will be described through the rhetor, character, audience, event, the message, exigence, constraints, and setting.

**Rhetor and Characters**

The rhetor for these three media artifacts are separate but associated with each other through the insulin crisis. Beginning with Eli Lilly, the rhetor is Eli Lilly announcing their new price cuts for the costs of commonly used insulins. The rhetor, although never narrowed down to one person, can be associated with the CEO of the company who adds to the press release in a quote.

  As for the Human Rights Watch report, the rhetor is the Human Rights Watch author although it has a character element that adds to their narrative as well. Once again though no one is named specifically, the rhetor of the article provides insight into the reality of what is happening with the insulin crisis in America. The characters of the

narrative are the two women, Skipper and her sister, who uncover the devastating reality of being unable to afford insulin. They also discovered the dangerous risks of rationing their medication.

Connor Behr is the rhetor for the Ted Talk, as he is speaking to his audience, he is guiding them through the steps he has taken to his potential solution to decreasing insulin costs. The character in his narrative is his sister who was diagnosed with type I diabetes when she was young. He relates, saying how the insulin crisis has personally affected his sister and family through the fear of being unable to afford insulin. He mentions four other characters in his narrative as well- the four most recent deaths of young Americans who have passed due to rationing their insulin.

**Audience**

Each one of these media artifacts strives to target the same general audience, those effected by diabetes. The demographic can range from middle-aged adults to the elderly. The media artifacts target this specific audience by appointing to their current life crisis due to the high costs of insulin.

The third media artifact, Connor Behr’s Ted Talk had a third targeted audience as well: younger generations of innovators. The target audience ranges from young- adults to middle-aged adults. As a press release, alongside young to middle adults, Eli Lilly’s article's target audience was also the businesses and representatives of state legal counsel in response to recent lawsuits from the state against the company for such high rates.

**Message and Exigence**

This leads me to the message and exigence of the media artifacts. The Eli Lilly press release relies on the message of assuming new territory in the insulin space by capping prices and creating a more affordable price tag for each patient. The company is relying on its company to care for its consumers and that they have the best interest of its patients.

Whereas the Human Rights Watch journalistic article *If I’m Out of Insulin, I’m Going to Die*, has a drastically different message although following the same generalized theme of insulin prices. The message of Human Rights Watch portrays the severity of the crisis. They do this by sharing the personal experiences of patients who ration their insulin due to such high costs. The message progresses into the monopoly of the three companies that have the insulin market. It shares how the United States government has not done a lot to aid these Americans making matters worse.

As for Connor Behr’s Ted Talk, the message that Behr relates to the audience is the potential solutions to cutting the costs of insulin. His message portrays that there may be a bright side at the end of the long, dark tunnel. Showcasing science and new abilities to help cut the costs of insulin, Behr’s message is a form of inspiration proving to a younger audience that we can change reality. Although, he claims in his message that we must come together as a community to provide hope and stop the monopoly of the three major companies.

Next, is the exigence of these media artifacts. It is the problem of the insulin crisis. Each of the media artifacts addresses the consequences of high inflation of the cost of insulin and how it is affecting the well-being of patients. Eli Lilly’s press release, although it does not blatantly address the problem word for word, insinuates that they are addressing the exigence of the insulin crisis by making it more affordable. Whereas the Human Rights Watch goes into precise detail on the exigence of the insulin crisis and the severity of health risks it is causing. As for Connor Behr’s Ted Talk, he pinpoints the insulin costs as the exigence during the introduction of his speech. Once he relies on his personal story of his family, he then proceeds with his potential solution to exigence.

**Setting and Theme**

  Furthermore, the settings for each media artifact vary due to their date of publication. As Connor Behr was the first media artifact to be published in the sample set, the setting was at the height of the insulin crisis. Behr articulated his speech right before the pandemic in 2019 when the price points for insulin had reached an absurd amount. People were without work due to Covid-19, and many found it even more difficult to pay high prices for only small vials a month.

Human Rights Watch released its report in 2022. However, the insulin crisis at this point was still a huge issue for many who couldn’t afford to live, the price points of insulin had begun to decrease due to the scrutiny of the crisis through the media. As an organization, Human Rights Watch captured the exact setting its target audience had been facing at the time. They did this by relating a personal story from someone who had been rationing their insulin. It was a desperate time of need for the audience during the time period this article was released.

Leading to the most recent media artifact, Eli Lilly’s press release. Eli Lilly is an American insulin company; their headquarters are based in Indiana. Most recently, the organization has been receiving lawsuits from state representatives, for example, in California. These lawsuits argue that the company, and the other two major insulin providers, have been illegally inflating insulin prices within the past ten years, making it unsafe and putting risk to patients' lives. According to the New York Times, California is one of the most recent states to sue.

“With a population of 39 million, California has now become the largest state to sue the major companies on the insulin market, accusing them of illegally inflating the price of the treatment and spawning a financial and public health crisis,” (Ryan, 2023).

Following these allegations, the company stated that it had been decreasing prices in the past five years for patients by alleviating some financial concerns. However, many media outlets were quick to point the blame for such high prices on Eli Lilly and the other top two insulin companies. The setting revolving around this press release is a response to these allegations and lawsuits about the company’s care for the well-being of patients. It came at a time when no companies had taken the initiative to cut down their prices and cap out-of-pocket costs for patients. This was Eli Lilly’s response to becoming perceived as the better company for their targeted audience. Their audience had entertained the future when the insulin crisis could become less of a risk to their life, and now Eli Lilly has given them a potential solution.

**Constraints**

Continuing with this, there are constraints following the three media artifacts. Eli Lilly’s press release and the Human Rights Watch article can be identified as public service announcements. Every public service announcement encounters the great unknown of how the audience is going to react to the publication. Through Aristotle’s inartistic proofs of Ethos, Pathos, and Logos, the media artifacts push against the constraints through persuasion.

Having the insulin crisis as the theme, each media artifact portrays an epistemic plot. An epistemic plot in a narrative is defined as a plot that engages the audience leaving the consumer desiring to know more. In this case for these three media artifacts, each separate narrative leaves the audience to learn more whether this is through, learning about the severity, how a major insulin company is taking action, or how the younger generations can innovate a new way to reduce the high costs.

**Narrative Criticism**

Now, implementing the procedure of Narrative Criticism to further analyze the three media artifacts it is important to recognize the four main aspects of narratives. These are the setting, rhetor, audience, and objective. Reflecting on the descriptions above of these four elements specific to each media artifact, it is easier for the audience to connect with each of the objectives from the rhetor of the media artifacts through each narrative story presented. Within further analysis, I will be evaluating the key features of each of the narratives within all three artifacts to see if there is a correlation between the features and the presented objectives. It is crucial to understand how narratives can persuade an audience, especially in healthcare media artifacts.

**Analysis**

To begin, the first media artifact to be further analyzed is Connor Behr’s Ted Talk *An Idea for the Insulin Cost Crisis for Type 1 Diabetics.*Behr’s speech is a narrative based on scientific innovations on potential strategies of how to decrease the high costs of insulin. In his speech, Behr educates the audience on the science behind insulin as well as its history. He shares with the audience that we have been skipping essential proteins via insulin that prevent the body from developing further medical conditions. This is when he introduces his idea of Physarum polycephalum, a type of organism that is one cell but copies itself repeatedly. He explains to the audience the significance of Physarum polycephalum and how we can use it to have a simpler way of producing insulin. Behr closes with his main objective for his narrative, wrapping that this insulin crisis is affecting many, and we need to join as a community to fight against the monopoly. “We need hope,” said Behr as he finalized his speech after showing four young adults who had recently passed away due to rationing their insulin. Behr’s voice throughout his speech is strong and assertive as he confidently relies on the information of his audience.

 Although, he adds personal flare to his narrative as the rhetor through humor and the personal connection he has to the insulin crisis. Through his vocal pitch, and pronunciation of words, Behr’s Ted Talk has a feature that the other two media artifacts do not, and that is his influence through voice. Psychology Today emphasizes how a speaker’s pitch and vocal patterns can influence a perspective on information being understood.

 “From pitch and speed to filler words and accents, vocal features influence how one’s message and one’s identity is perceived” (Fagan, 2019).

 Behr also focuses on two main methods of persuasion to guide the audience into understanding the science behind insulin and how it is vital to patients diagnosed with diabetes.

Through Logos and Pathos, Behr creates an innovative way to persuade and influence the understanding of the insulin crisis. Using logos, Behr utilizes statistics of those affected by the insulin crisis and science to further back his argument of why the insulin crisis is an issue at hand. Although, not only does Behr use this statistic, but he also utilizes Logos to provide logic to his narrative by sharing there are extreme health risks to rationing insulin.

According to Jack Caulfield from Scribbr, “Logos is a logical appeal, refers to the use of reasoned arguments to persuade. It is the dominant approach…” (Caulfield, 2022).

 In continuation, Behr tugs on the heartstrings of the audience through his feature of Pathos. After reviewing Becheur’s study and analysis of emotion, I’ve found there are two types of emotion, primary and self-conscious emotion. Primary emotions are known “to be triggered through universal situations, characterized between facial expressions and physiological reactions” (Becheur, 2018). Whereas self-conscious emotions can be defined as “requiring certain events that only the concerned individuals can identify. These emotions are affected more by the evaluation of society’s standards, rules, and goals, another term they have known as social emotions” (Becheur, 2018). Through Behr’s speech, he is expressing both types of emotions as he shares the deaths of those affected by the high costs of insulin. is through these key features that Behr the rhetor is able to effectively influence his audience on the objective of his narrative as a call to action amongst the community.

Proceeding is the next media artifact of the Human Rights Watch journalistic article and report, *If I’m Out of Insulin, I’m Going to Die.*This media artifact is huge when it comes to influencing the perspective of society on the insulin crisis. It takes all three persuasive aspects of the report to give a clear representation of the insulin crisis. Human Rights Watch uses logos as a key feature of its report to present its argument on the insulin crisis in America and where to put the blame. Using graphs, research, sources of interviews, and letters from the top three insulin companies, Human Rights Watch provides an in-depth analysis of the history of the insulin crisis, arguing how it is affecting those who cannot afford the high prices. This puts the use of multiple resources to defend their position on the insulin crisis and influences the audience to perceive the crisis at its worst during the time it was published in 2022. Even highlighted words like “inadequate” and “undermine” are the rhetor's choice to further convey their message. The overall objective of the narrative that Human Rights Watch is conveying is there is not enough being done within the community and government to diminish

the high insulin prices across America.

Another aspect of the inartistic proof Human Rights Watch uses to influence its audience is Pathos. This narrative the Human Rights Watch creates effectively influences the objective by putting the audience in the shoes of someone who rations insulin and the detrimental risks that follow suit with it. As the rhetor takes the reader along the personalized story, they weave in a statistic of how the insulin crisis is being created and how many have turned a blind eye to the government. According to Harvard Business Review, telling a story is much more successful than simply stating numbers and stats to a reader, but intertwining both strategies can impact the perspective of an audience more as they can connect their emotions to the situation.

“Effective storytelling can serve anyone in leadership who seeks to persuade others to his or her point of view. Opinion-based rhetoric is often more polarizing than persuasive, while statistics often go in one ear and out the other. But a careful blending of rhetoric and facts, woven into the right story, can change minds,”(Baldoni, 2022).

The rhetor in *If I’m Out of Insulin, I’m Going to Die,* is highlighting emotion from the audience to draw their attention to the material before continuing with their report. Ensuing their statistics throughout the article and continuously wrapping the audience back into their story creates a strong narrative these features can influence an audience effectively. This leads me to the realization of how media portrays information, then shares this on a widespread platform for many to see. A study by Clarke et Al. *Mass Media Depictions of Cancer and Heart Disease: Community Versus Individualistic Perspectives?*Analyzes just how media can influence society’s perspectives on various types of media.

“As Kitzinger (1998) has said, ‘At the most basic level, the mass media (news reports, soap operas, and films) are clearly used as common reference points to justify certain points of view,’” (Clarke et Al. 2008).

In this case, this finding from Clarke further represents how media can portray information whether it is on social media, print media, or any other form of communication. For Human Rights Watch the rhetor uses multiple reference points that justify their objective in influencing the reader that the insulin crisis is a serious issue at hand.

Next, the final and most recent media artifact to be further analyzed is Eli Lilly’s press release *Lilly Cuts Insulin Prices by 70% and Caps Patient Insulin Out-of-Pocket Costs at $35 Per Month.*This article has a multitude of ways it can influence society’s perspectives on the insulin crisis. First, the title when an audience glances at the title they are to believe that Eli Lilly has cut all insulin prices by 70 percent. Although this certainly is not the case, the title can be found deceiving as the audience continues to read only to find that three of Eli Lilly’s insulins are getting a price cut, leaving out over 20 other insulin prescriptions. Confirming that headlines are a feature that can influence a perspective is a journalistic article by Maria Konnikova,

“…crafting of the headline subtly shifts the perception of the text that follows. By drawing attention to certain details or facts, a headline [can affect](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0361476X06000348) what existing knowledge is activated in your head. By its choice of phrasing, a headline [can influence](http://psycnet.apa.org/index.cfm?fa=buy.optionToBuy&id=1971-26132-001) your mindset as you read so that you later recall details that coincide with what you were expecting,” (Konnikova, 2014).

In this case, the rhetor (Eli Lilly) was creating a shift in mindset about the company’s actions immediately through the title. In continuation with this influence on the perspective of the insulin crisis, Eli Lilly used the inartistic proof of Ethos to continue to lean the audience into their perspective. The rhetor uses their word choice to frame their company in light of the crisis by claiming the company has been doing right, for the many Americans struggling to pay for their medicine and has been decreasing prices since 2018. Circling back to Clarke’s analysis as mentioned above, Clarke describes media as a form of framing an image on any type of issue at hand.

“The mass media have a role in framing issues (Goffman 1974). Just as a picture in an art gallery is generally framed, so to are media stories (Altheide 2002). Such frames establish the definition of the problem under discussion and emphasize ‘some aspects of a perceived reality’ rather than others,” (Clarke et Al. 2008).

Further analyzing this, the way that Eli Lilly presents itself as accompanied throughout the press release is effectively influencing the audience to believe that the company does care about the patients and hopes to help. It is to keep in mind, that yes, the company is cutting 70 percent of prices for their three insulins, but it is important to know that this may be in response to the recent lawsuits the company has faced due to the high price of inflation of their products. After the release of the Eli Lilly article, many news sites and the President celebrated the price changes, encouraging others to do the same. It is to say that the rhetor successfully influenced the audience’s perspective through these features, due to the praise received afterward. This may offer the audience hope for a sudden shift in the insulin crisis.

In conclusion, all three media artifacts have influenced their audience over time as they have been shared. It is because of the scrutiny and awareness; the media has influenced the perspective of the audience to stand against the insulin crisis. The effects of Aristotle’s inartistic proofs can be intertwined with media artifacts very subtly, but with further analysis, it is important to recognize that each of these proofs can play a huge part in any media artifact. These proofs can influence our perspectives on health care issues whether it be the insulin crisis or not. Narratives are a way to personalize points of view to an audience. These narratives are everywhere within the media of healthcare. It is important to be aware of the setting, audience, rhetor, and characters of each narrative you read of healthcare media artifacts because they can influence your perspective on an ongoing issue at hand. It is vital to be aware of the features within each media artifact that could influence your point of view. Before hitting share, I encourage a reader to analyze the article they read and dive into some more research on the topic because each media is just a close-up frame on a point of view.

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