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English 5

14 March 2019

“Superbugs” and Pharmaceutical Companies

Andy Lee Roth and Mickey Huff’s book titled *Censored 2018* is a collection of the most underreported news stories that took place between 2016 and 2017. Many of the stories that were addressed in this book received very little and in some cases, no coverage from mainstream media outlets. The lack of coverage from these stories did not publicly reveal the truth behind serious events taking place worldwide and were censored through specific filters, as discussed in Edward S. Herman’s “Propaganda Model.” However, *Censored 2018* includes the voices of many researchers who explored these underreported stories and uncovered the reality behind these events.

One notable story that was included in this book and was researched by Yadira Martinez and Bridgette McShea focuses on how the emergence of “superbugs” has resulted in an impact on the role of antibiotics but have also become unsafe to individuals and the environment. While antibiotics are generally used to help treat people with viruses, superbugs are forms of “bacteria” that inhibit the performance of antibiotics (Martinez and McShea, 55). Madlen Davies, the author of *How Big Pharma’s Industrial Waste is Fuelling the Rise in Superbugs Worldwide*, points out that the spread of superbugs is actually happening while antibiotics are being created at elite pharmaceutical companies (Martinez and McShea, 55). Davies additionally reports that these companies are primarily based in countries like China and India that also serve as leading

distributors to other countries, including the United States, but are conforming to unethical standards by allowing "...[raw] waste fluids..." to enter the environment and weakening the function of antibiotics (Martinez and McShea, 55). Although the ongoing problems with superbugs were noted *Censored 2018*, this story has not received coverage from mainstream media outlets and has mainly been filtered out of the news to protect elite pharmaceutical companies from getting exposed.

"Ownership" is a key filter of the Propaganda Model that has limited this story from receiving mainstream coverage. As Davies's story explains that China and India are known for having top pharmaceutical companies that create and distribute antibiotics worldwide, an official from the UK National Health Service named Dame Sally Davies stated that superbugs have attributed to nearly "...25,000 [deaths throughout] Europe..." (Martinez and McShea, 55). Given that this story was published on *The Bureau of Investigative Journalism*, this website mentions that it "co-publishes" events along with other media groups to provide global and "quality" news coverage even though mainstream coverage groups have failed to shed light on this worldwide issue. Clearly, as pharmaceutical companies in China and India have a major role in developing most of the world's antibiotics while following questioning procedures, these companies are benefiting from this story not being publicly reporting due to their significant authority. In fact, the corporations have the ability to filter out stories that inform people about the reality of superbugs and instead promote their antibiotics as safe to use. This "profit motive" mindset essentially gives corporations more power to expand their revenue while consumers around the world are purchasing these antibiotics with no truth behind the information of superbugs, placing them at high health risks as well as exposure to the environment.

While “ownership” is a key filter that has been used in this particular story, “advertising” can also be connecting reason as to why superbugs are not discussed in mainstream media. In an article posted on the *Scientific American* titled *Dangerous New Antibiotic-Resistant Bacteria Reach U.S.*, Melinda Wenner Moyer addresses a case in which a woman from the United States acquired a “urinary tract infection” and was given an antibiotic called “colistin,” typically used as a way to recover from the infection after many attempts. After taking the antibiotic, Moyer states that the woman’s infection still demonstrated resistance to colistin and the rejection came as a shocking discovery to scientific experts as they became concerned that antibiotic resistance amongst frequently occurring infections may become a prevalent issue (Martinez and McShea, 56). This article showcases an example of how a specific antibiotic that is commonly used as a last option for recovery proved to be ineffective for treating a patient’s infection. In addition, the worries expressed by scientific experts about the future of treating ordinary infections with antibiotics highlights that an alternative treatment might have to be found in order to properly treat people. Despite the fact that superbugs have developed as strong forms of resistance to antibiotics and even harm the environment, this case correlates to the idea of how pharmaceutical companies are creating antibiotics that may not prove to be the most effective in treating certain infections. These companies are carelessly allowing for toxic wastes to enter the environment and are not taking a step to prevent the exposure of superbugs. Nevertheless, information on how antibiotic resistance and the cause of superbugs are emerging is not being advertised at all through mainstream media or even social media, where most of the public receives their news. Instead, these stories are being partially discussed through outlets that are strictly academic-based and only targets an audience that intends to do research.

“Flak” is another filter that has interrupted this story from receiving great news coverage through mainstream media. For example, Davies cites an “independent review” that was conducted by an economist Professor named Jim O’Neill, who pointed out that if there are no standards set in place to stop the rise of antibiotic resistance, this can consequently result in “...10 million [deaths worldwide]...” and would have a larger impact than cancer (*The Bureau of Investigative Journalism*). Davies further comments that while healthcare organizations are distributing antibiotics to patients for fighting off infections, antibiotics are also used for precautionary measures so that patients can avoid getting an infection before they have treatments such as “surgery” or “chemotherapy” (*The Bureau of Investigative Journalism*). O’Neill’s explanation regarding the rise of antibiotic resistance portrays that this issue is still ongoing and becoming more of a global concern. Since there are no formed regulations for pharmaceutical companies to adhere to, these companies are going to continue following unethical procedures that allow for superbugs to loom and become a big factor to antibiotic resistance, creating health risks and a hazard to the environment. As for healthcare organizations, these groups will continue providing antibiotics to their patients in an effort to help them recover yet, will be uncertain about the effectiveness of the medication and possibly cause them additional health issues. While these large pharmaceutical corporations are serving the entire world and seemingly have a lot of authority, “flak” is being used to filter and cover up the truth behind the growth of superbugs. These companies do not want to receive public backlash, especially from the consumers of antibiotics, in fears that people could form boycotts or even file major lawsuits that would have the ability to tarnish the reputation of these firms. In addition, the cover-up of this story could avoid powerful healthcare organizations from rising, forming even a

larger protest against these companies, and have a great impact on potentially fining or shutting down the firms.

Overall, the story regarding superbugs is a serious problem that has not received coverage from mainstream media groups. As dominant pharmaceutical companies in China and India are creating and delivering antibiotics to many countries, these firms are continuously maximizing their profits from consumers purchasing antibiotics. However, the public is not being alerted about some of the questioning procedures that these corporations follow and is ultimately putting people's health and the entire environment in jeopardy. Instead, consumers are being taken advantage of as they are being provided with antibiotics that may have resistance caused by superbugs. In an effort to bring awareness to this issue, mainstream outlets must expose the truth behind how antibiotics are being formed at these large pharmaceutical companies so that people around the world can properly recover.

Works Cited

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