

Patterns of Public Opinions about Obesity and People with Obesity in Different Countries

Theodore K. Kyle, Joseph F. Nadglowski, Ximena Ramos Salas, Diana M. Thomas, Rebecca M. Puhl, Krista Watts

Disclosures

- **Professional fees**
 - 3D Communications
 - Eisai
 - EnteroMedics
 - Novo Nordisk
 - Nutrisystem
- **Personal biases that favor:**
 - Evidence-based interventions, both prevention and treatment
 - Respect for people living with obesity
 - Critical thinking about all evidence

Acknowledgements

- **This research would not have been possible without**
 - **Grant support to OAC from Novo Nordisk**
 - **Collaboration and contributions from John Dixon, Daniele Di Pauli, Bruno Halpern, Anja Hilbert, Angelo Pietrobelli, Ida Vehag**

Views of obesity and people living with it

Background

Competing Narratives

Affect Ideas about Obesity Interventions

- **Moral failure**
“A disgusting failure of personal responsibility”
- **Addiction**
“Hooked on junk food & sugary drinks”
- **Toxic environment**
“Too much unhealthy food, exercise impossible”
- **Medical**
“Blaming, not helping people with this disease”



Source: Thibodeau et al, 2015

Pervasive Bias Hampers Clinical Care and Obesity-Related Policy

- Blaming people living with obesity
- Counterproductive tension between prevention and clinical care
- Dysfunctional medical dialogue

“Our findings add to a growing body of literature that challenges a number of widely held assumptions about obesity within a health care system that is currently unsupportive of individuals living with obesity.”

*– Kirk et al
Qual Health Res, 2014*

Key Elements of Bias Against People with Obesity

- Blame directed at people with obesity
- Assumptions of
 - Laziness
 - Poor discipline
- Social rejection



Blame, image © Ian Design / flickr

Ongoing Study of Biases About Obesity and People Living with It

- Measuring public attitudes in Australia, Brazil, Canada, Germany, Italy, Mexico, Sweden, UK, U.S.
- Assess agreement with different narratives for obesity
- Assess explicit beliefs about people with obesity
- Look for potential differences among the countries surveyed
- Monitor Trends

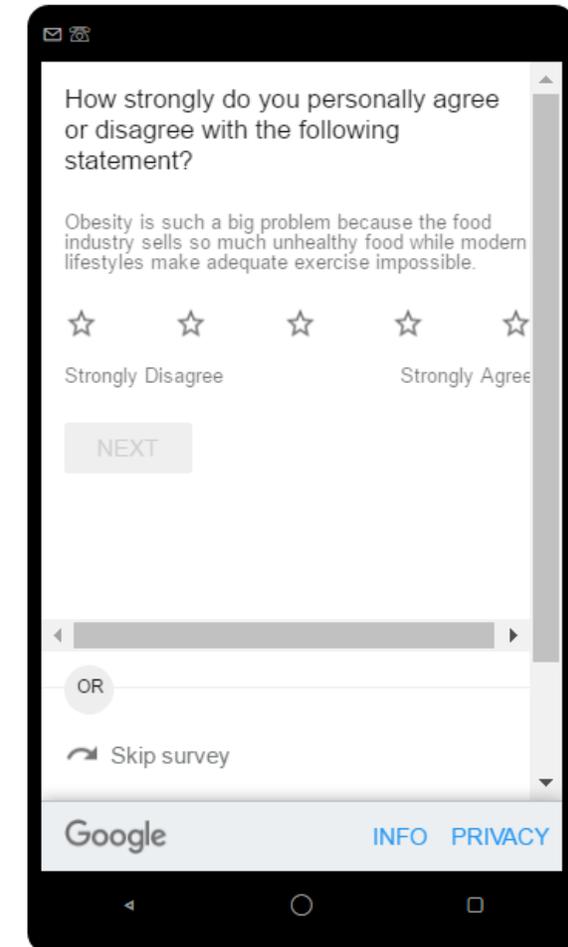
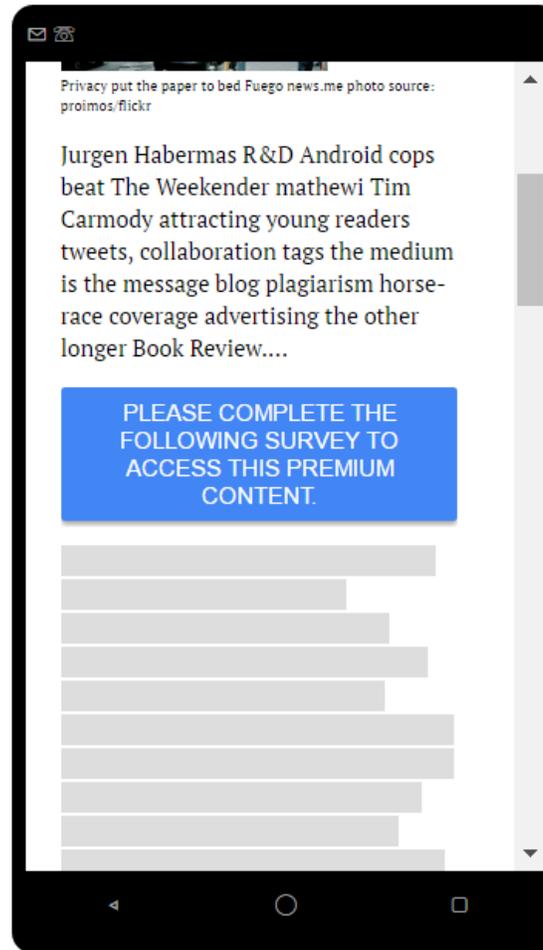
Framing Obesity as a Health Issue

Methods

Web and Smartphone Samples Obtained via Google Consumer Surveys

Sample Size

- **90,573 Total**



Each Respondent Answers Only 1 of 18 Questions

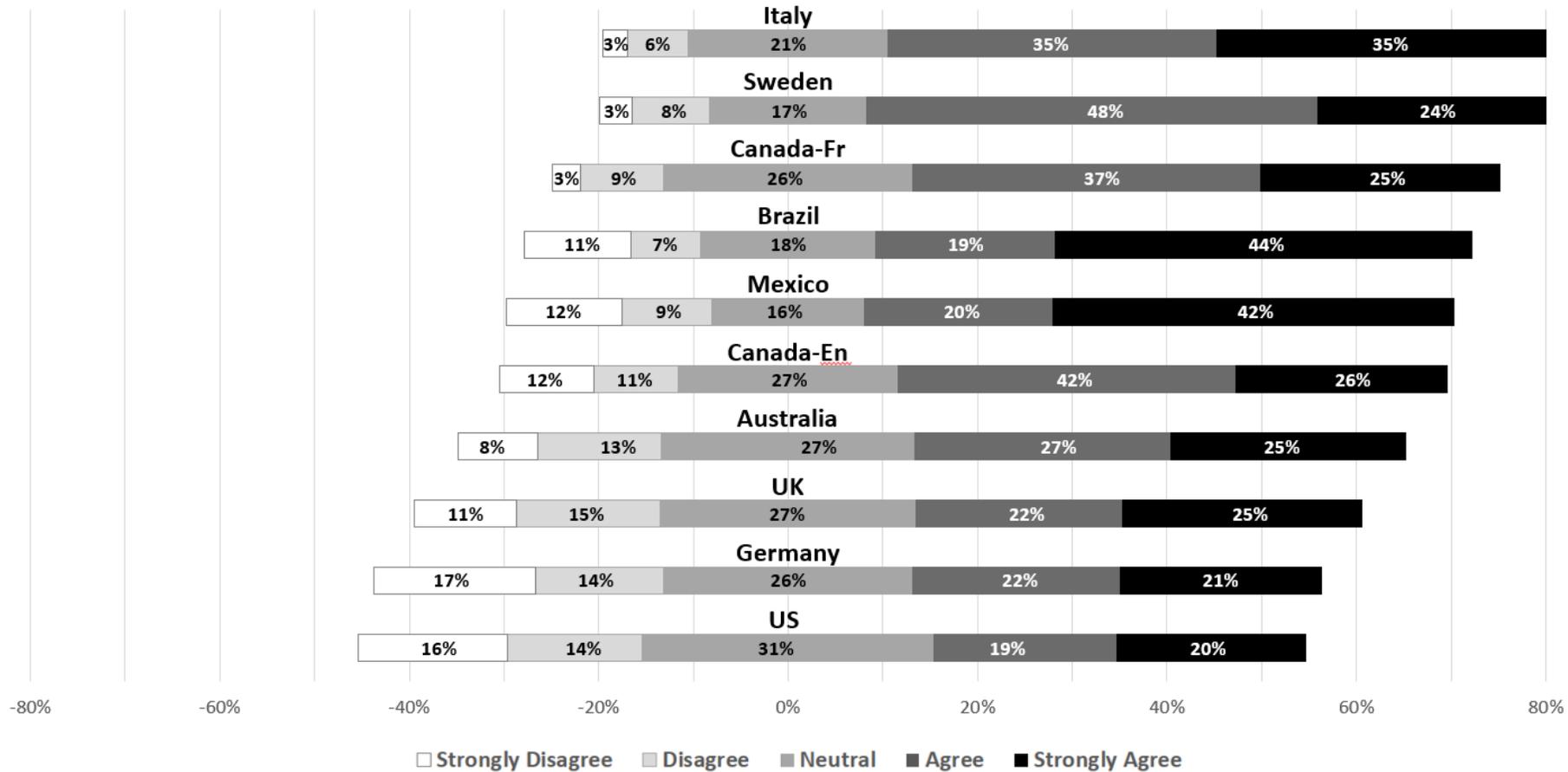
- **Microsurveys minimize fatigue**
- **5-point Likert scales**
“strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”
- **4 narratives about obesity causes**
- **Blame, social acceptance, laziness, and self-discipline of people with obesity**
 - Each question asked in both positive & negative form
- **Minimum 500 respondents for each question in each country/language**



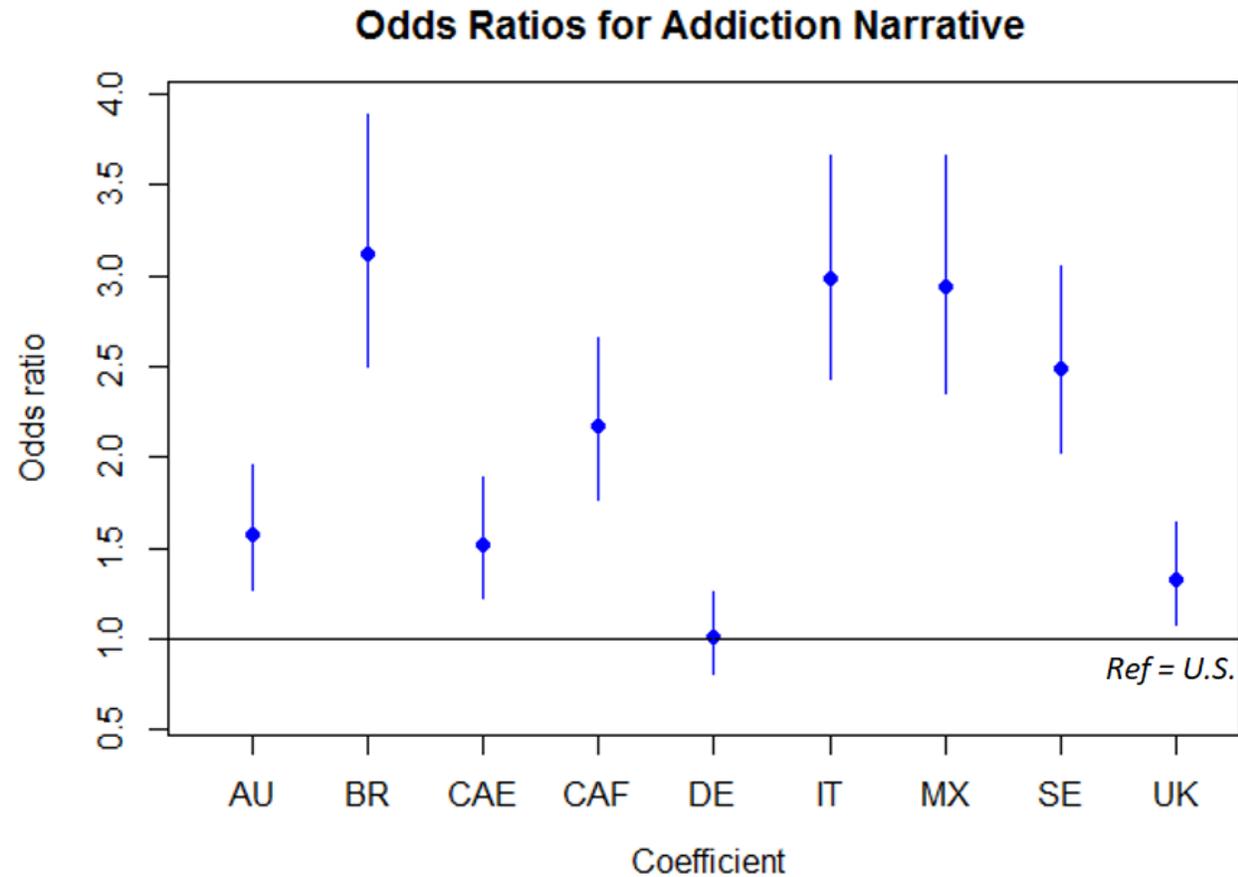
Framing Obesity as a Health Issue

Results

People Across the World Seem to Favor “Addiction” as an Explanation for Obesity

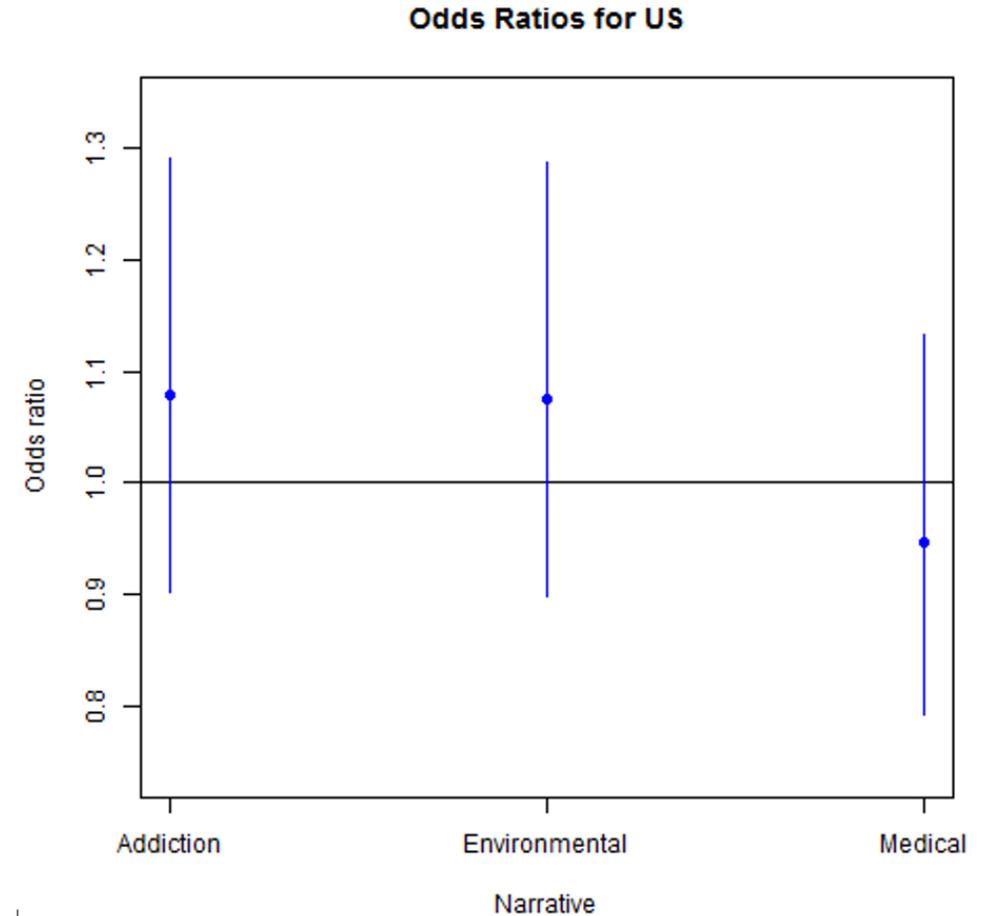
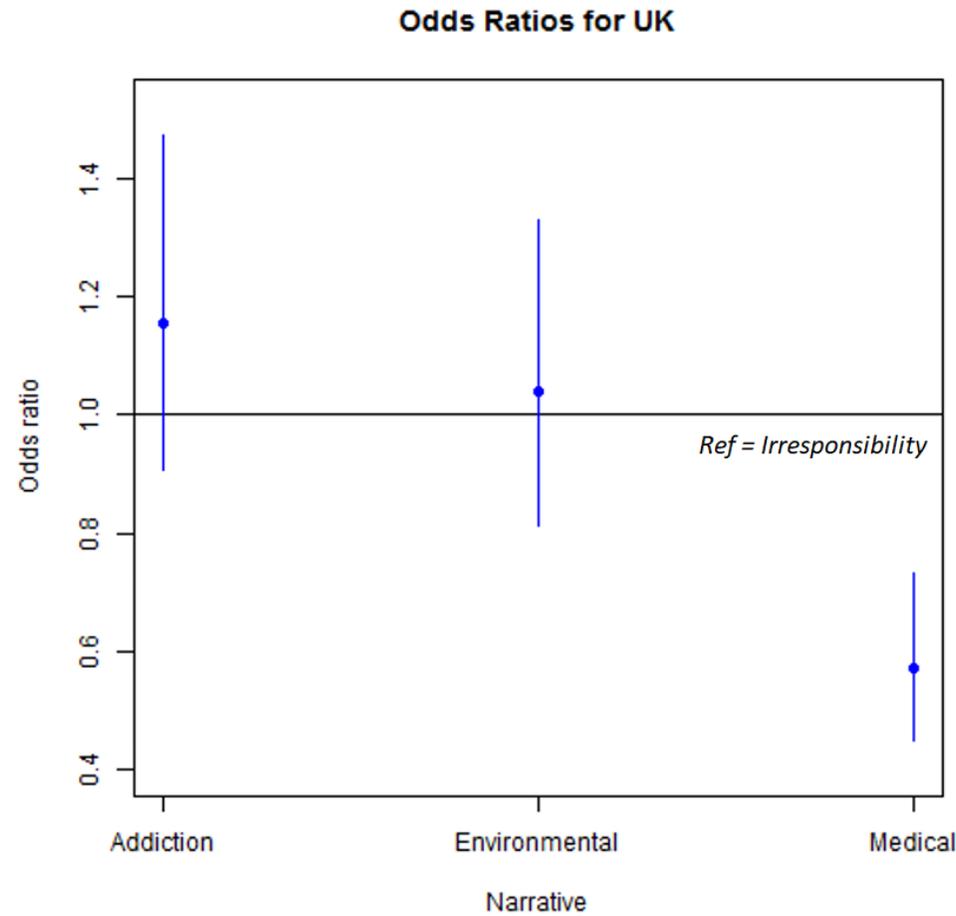


Belief in the “Addiction” Explanation Was Especially Strong in Brazil, CA-Fr, and Italy



Note: Odds ratios calculated from cumulative logit models

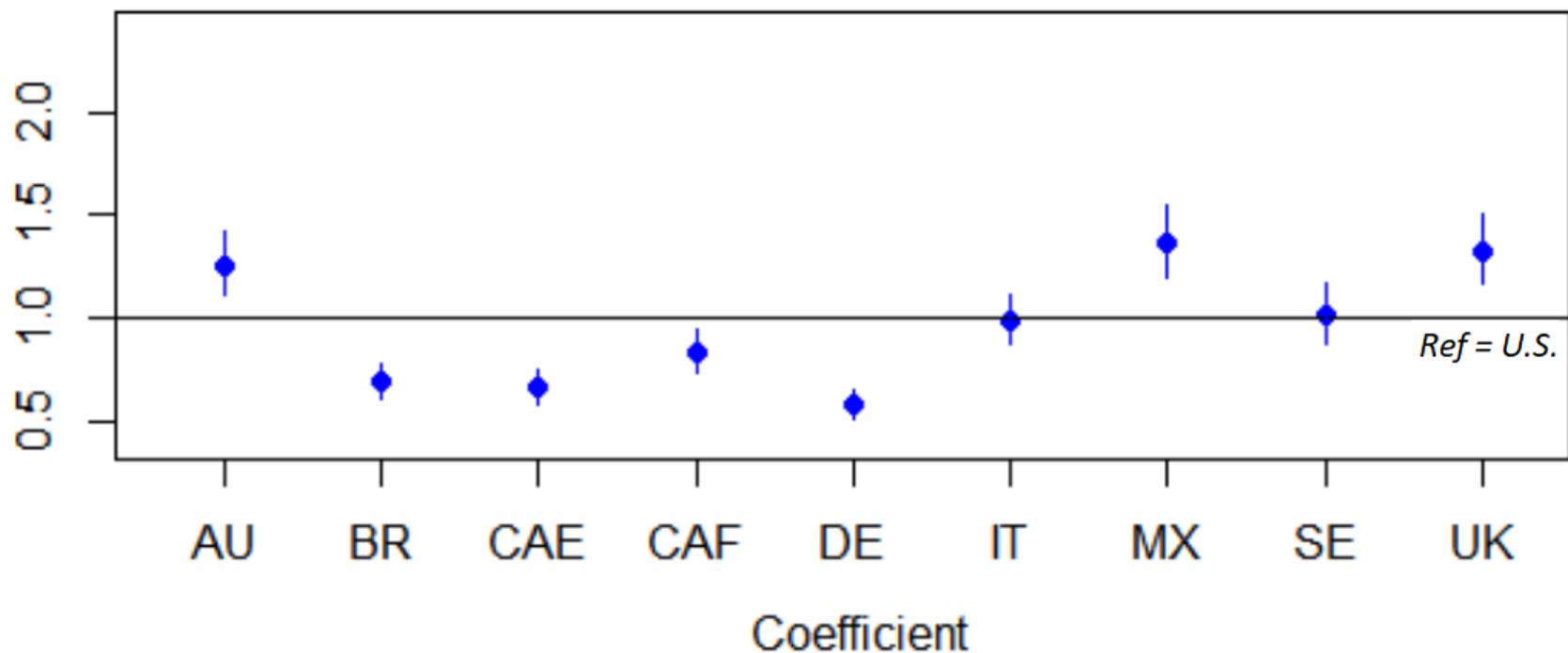
Only UK and U.S. Respondents Believed in Irresponsibility as Much as Other Explanations



Note: Odds ratios calculated from cumulative logit models

Across All Measures, UK Respondents Expressed Harsh Bias, While CA-Fr Expressed Less

Odds Ratios for Blame Questions
Higher Means More agreement with Blame



Note: Odds ratios calculated from cumulative logit models

Conclusions

- Public beliefs related to WB differ among these 9 populations
- Belief that addictive junk food causes obesity is strong
- That belief is especially strong in Brazil, Italy, and French Canada
- We found the harshest beliefs in the UK, less harsh beliefs in CA-Fr



More Information

- www.conscienhealth.org/news
-  [Facebook.com/ConscienHealth](https://www.facebook.com/ConscienHealth)
-  [@ConscienHealth](https://twitter.com/ConscienHealth)
- **For these slides:**
<http://conscienhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/ECO2018-Bias-Workshop.pdf>

Appendix

Competing Obesity Narratives

- **Irresponsibility**

"Obesity is such a big problem because too many people don't take personal responsibility for eating right and exercising. It's disgusting."

- **Addiction**

"Obesity is such a big problem because too many people get hooked on junk food and sugary drinks. They've become addicted and can't help themselves."

- **Environment**

"Obesity is such a big problem because the food industry sells so much unhealthy food while modern lifestyles make adequate exercise impossible."

- **Disease**

"Obesity is such a big problem because too many people get blamed for this disease instead of getting the medical help they need."

Adapted from Thibodeau et al. 2015.09