

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

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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

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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

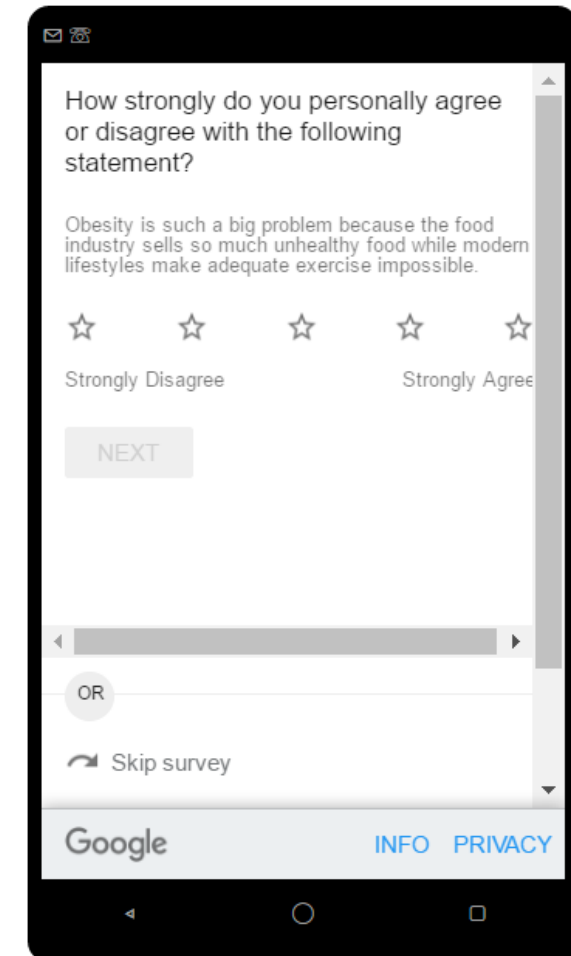
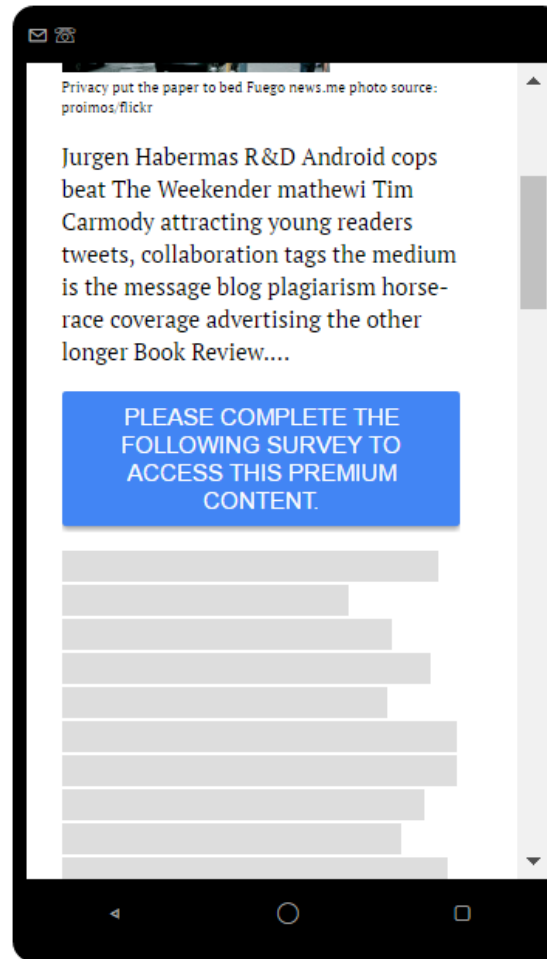
Framing Obesity as a Health Issue

Methods

Web and Smartphone Samples Obtained via Google Consumer Surveys

Sample Size

- **90,573 Total**



Each Respondent Answers Only 1 of 18 Questions

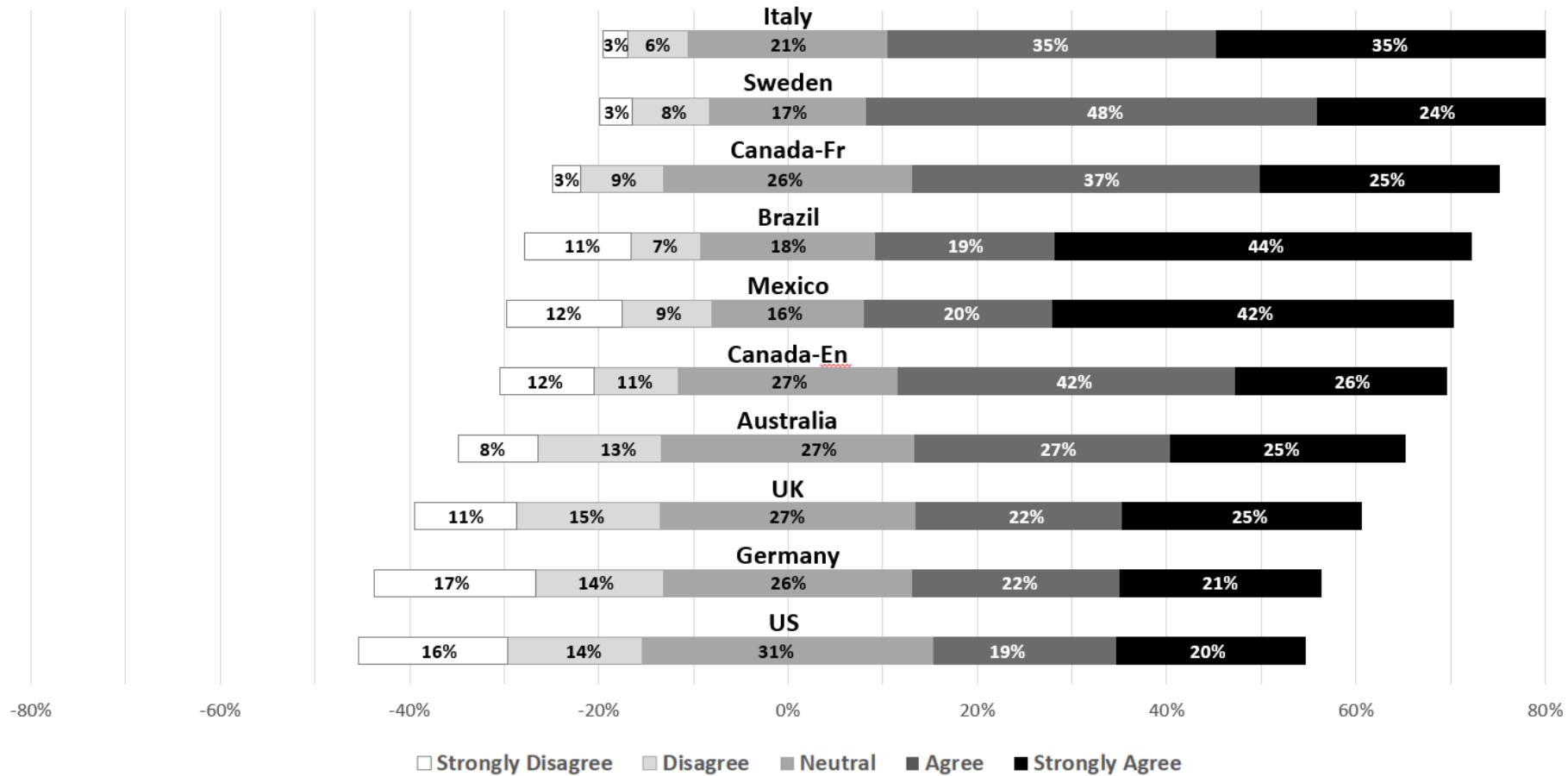
- **Microsurveys minimize fatigue**
- **5-point Likert scales**
“strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”
- **4 narratives about obesity causes**
- **Blame, social acceptance, laziness, and self-discipline of people with obesity**
 - Each question asked in both positive & negative form
- **Minimum 500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



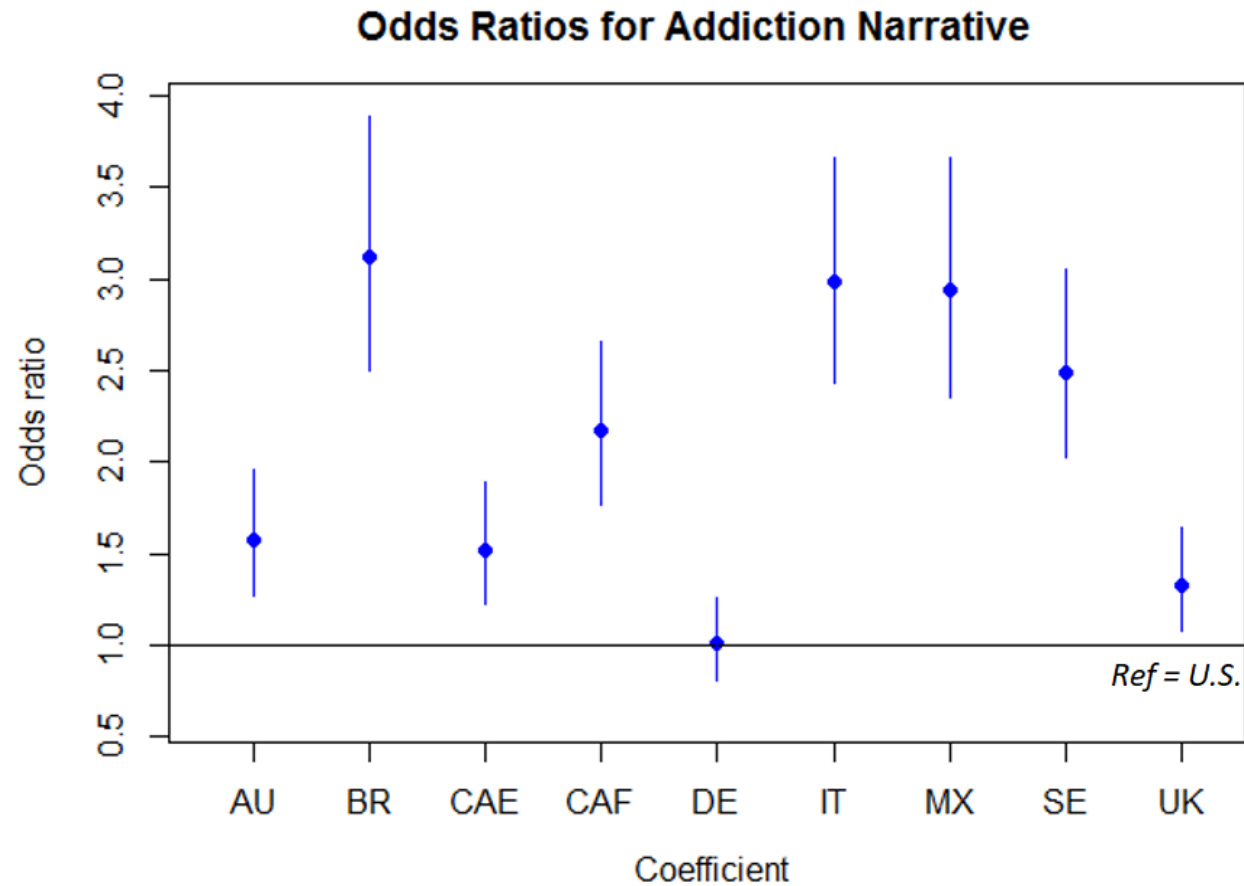
Framing Obesity as a Health Issue

Results

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

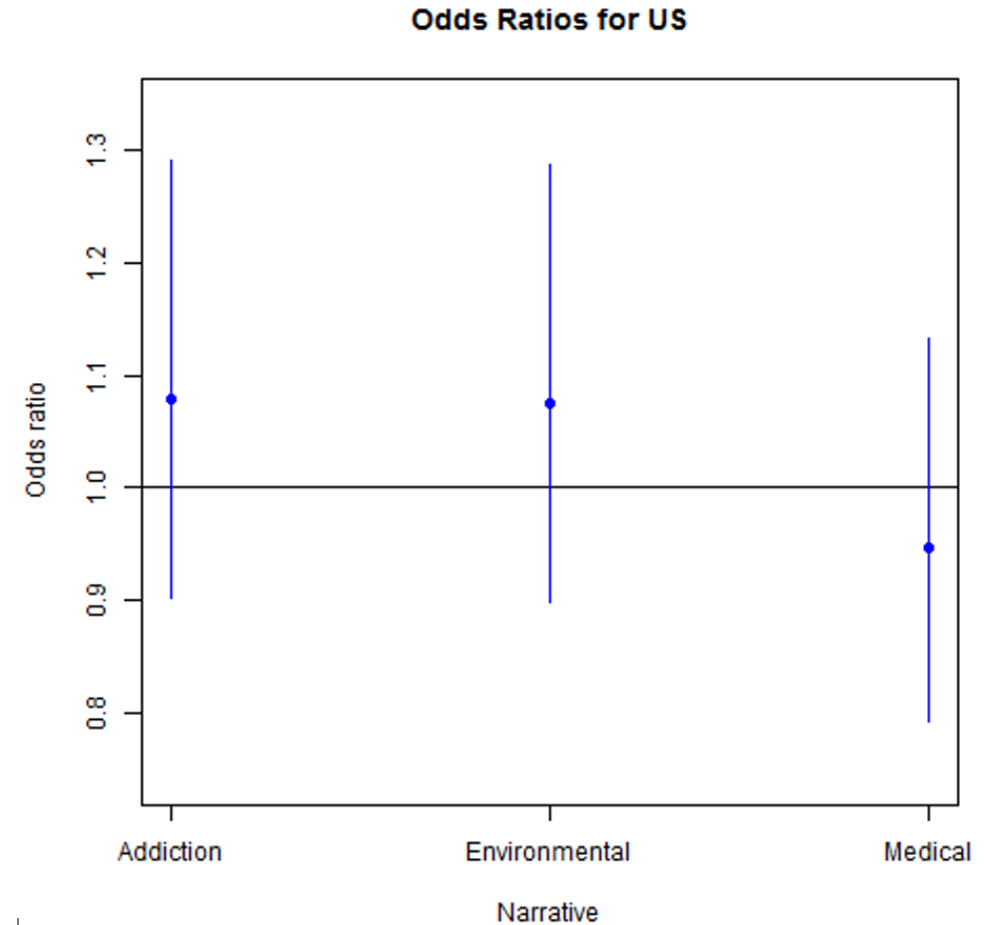
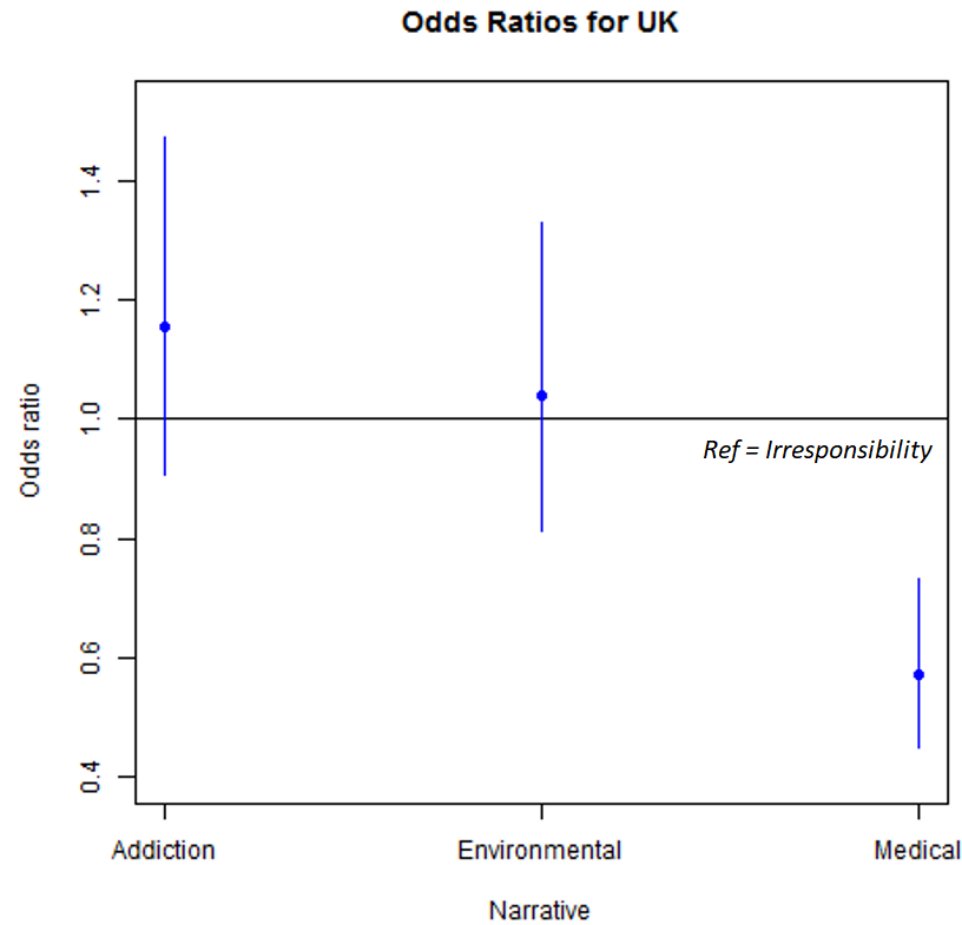


Belief in the “Addiction” Explanation Was Especially Strong in Brazil, CA-Fr, and Italy



Note: Odds ratios calculated from cumulative logit models

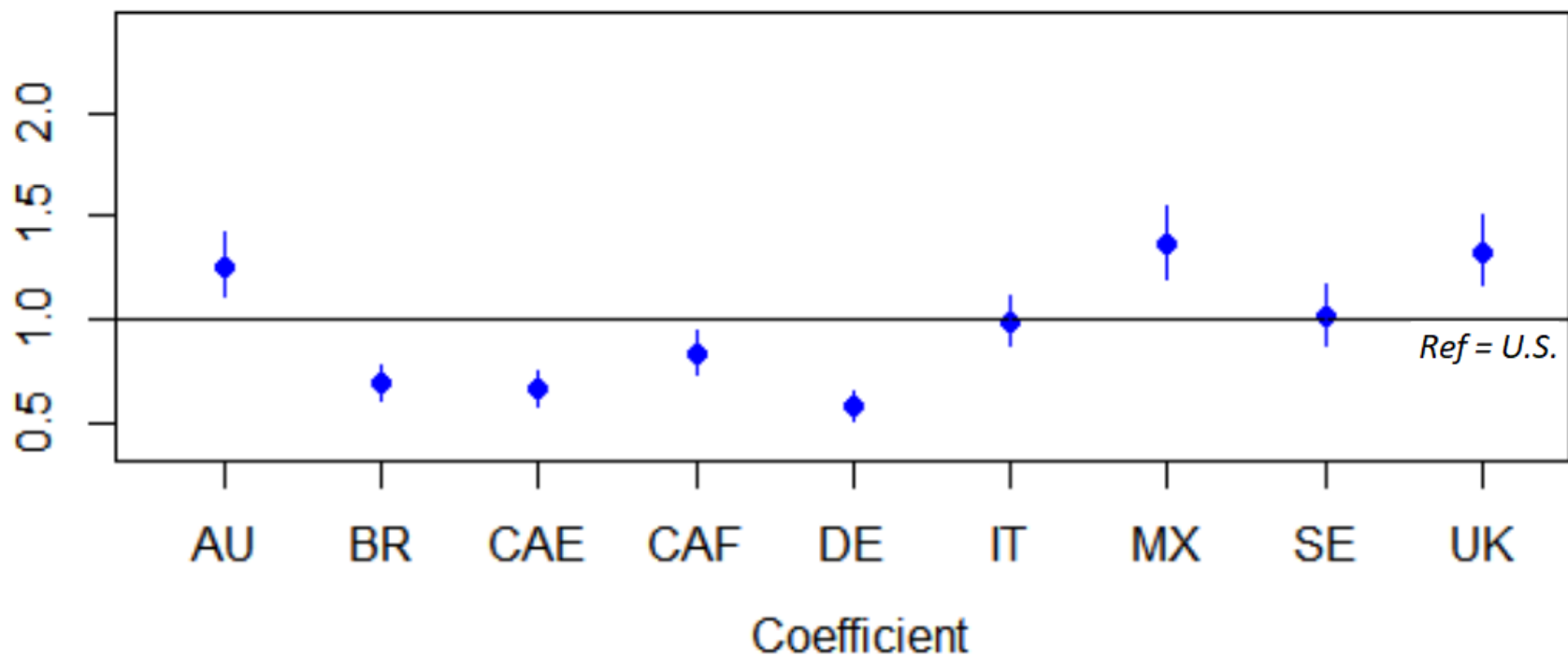
Only UK and U.S. Respondents Believed in Irresponsibility as Much as Other Explanations



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

