

# A Comparative Analysis of Explicit Weight Bias in the UK and Eight Other 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

# Acknowledgements

- **This research would not have been possible without**
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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

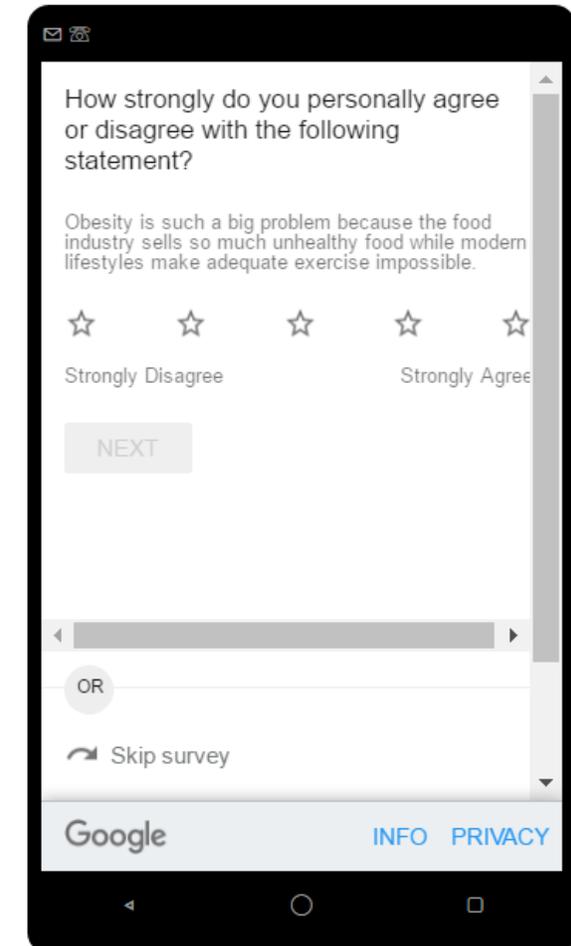
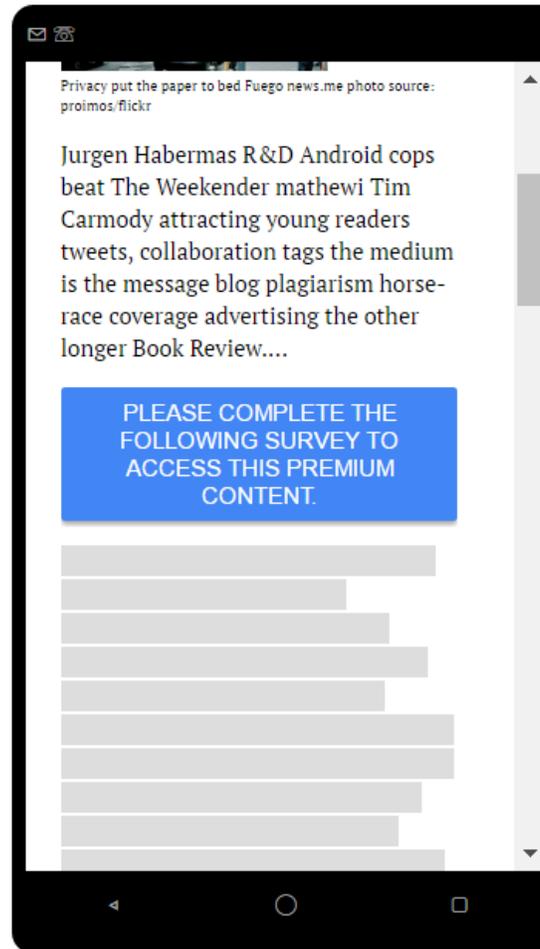
Framing Obesity as a Health Issue

# Methods

# Web and Smartphone Samples Obtained via Google Consumer Surveys

## Sample Size

- **90,573 Total**



# Each Respondent Answers Only 1 of 18 Questions

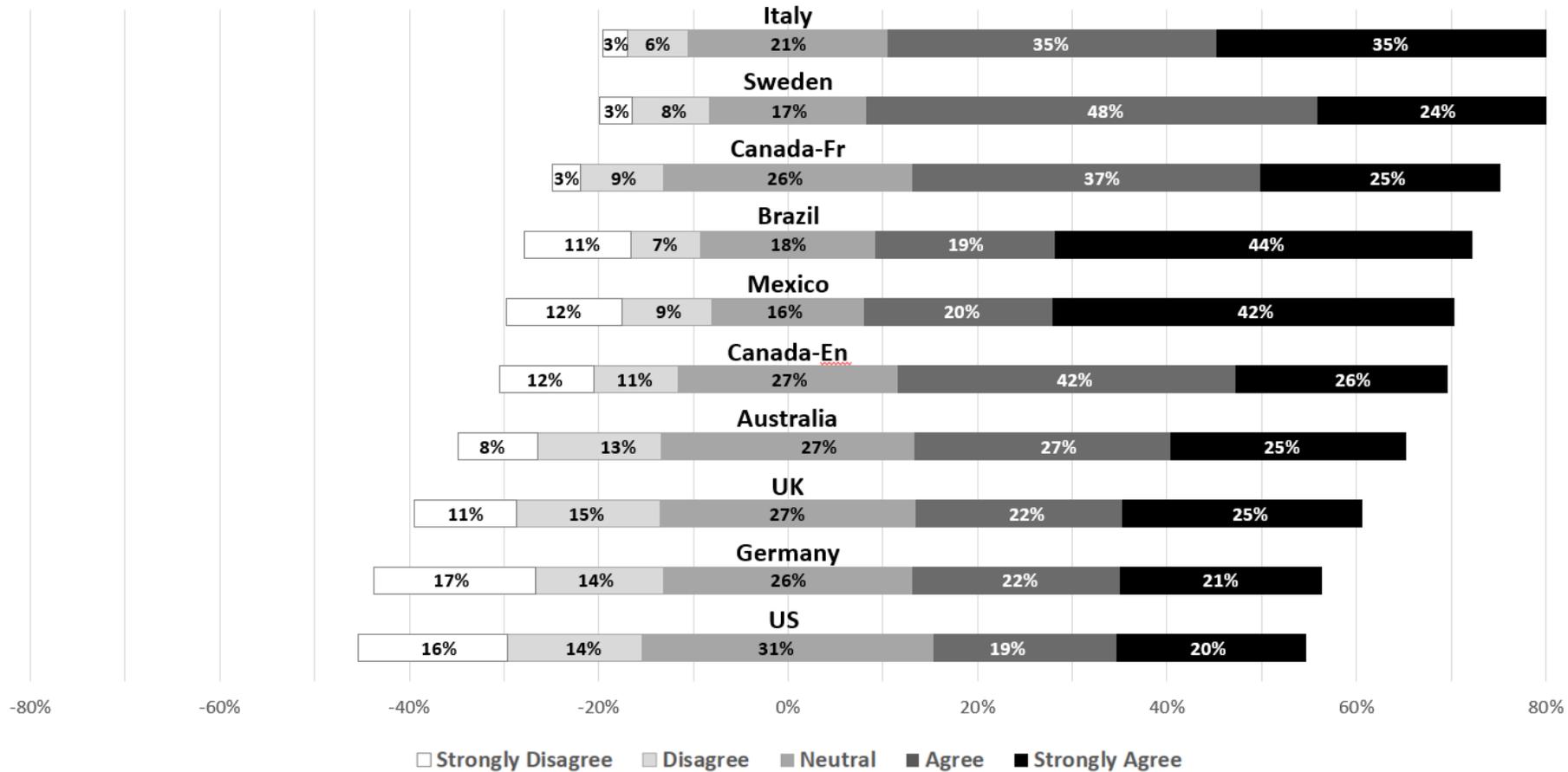
- **Microsurveys minimize fatigue**
- **5-point Likert scales**  
“strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”
- **4 narratives about obesity causes**
- **Blame, social acceptance, laziness, and self-discipline of people with obesity**
  - Each question asked in both positive & negative form
- **Minimum 500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



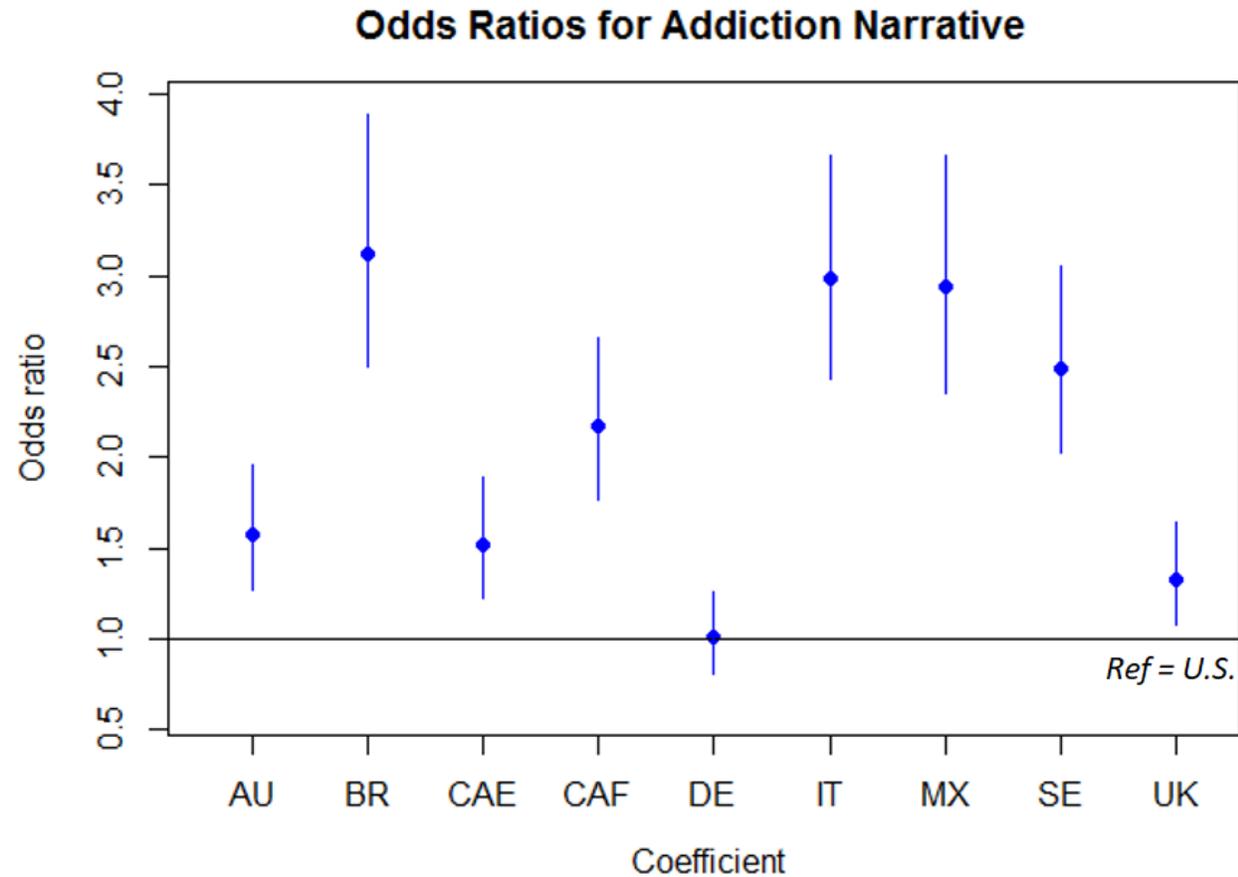
Framing Obesity as a Health Issue

# Results

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

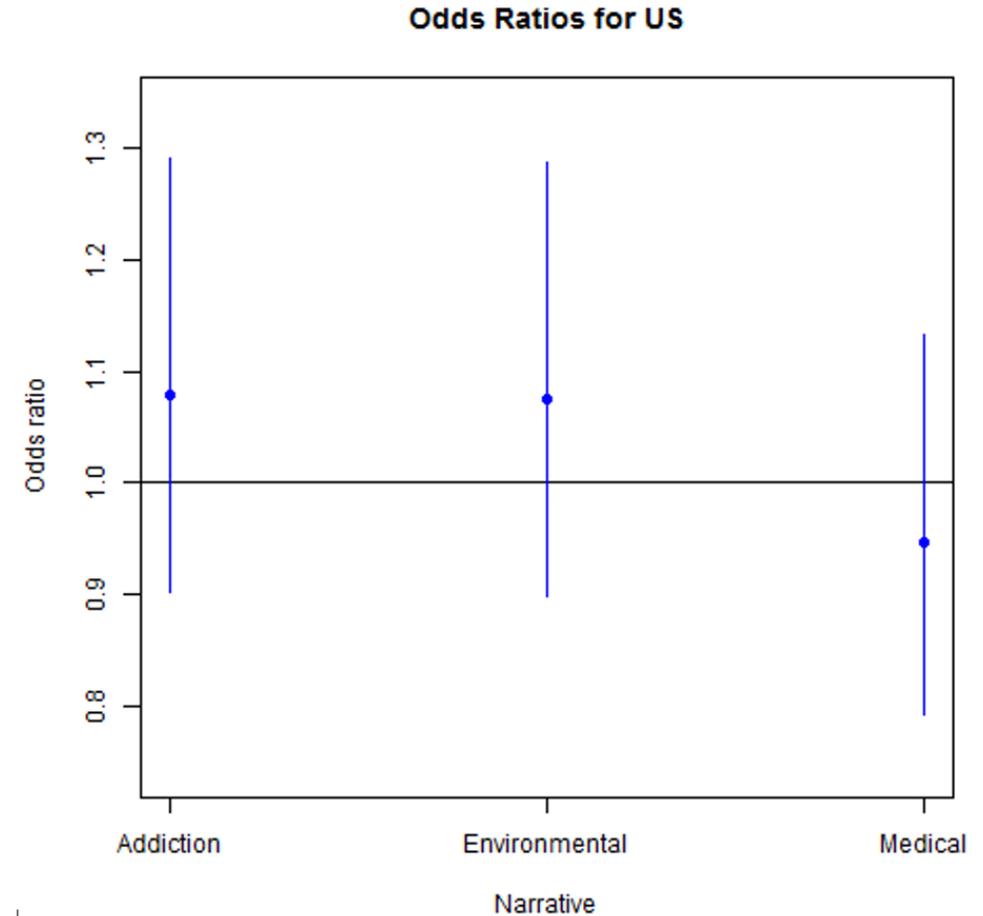
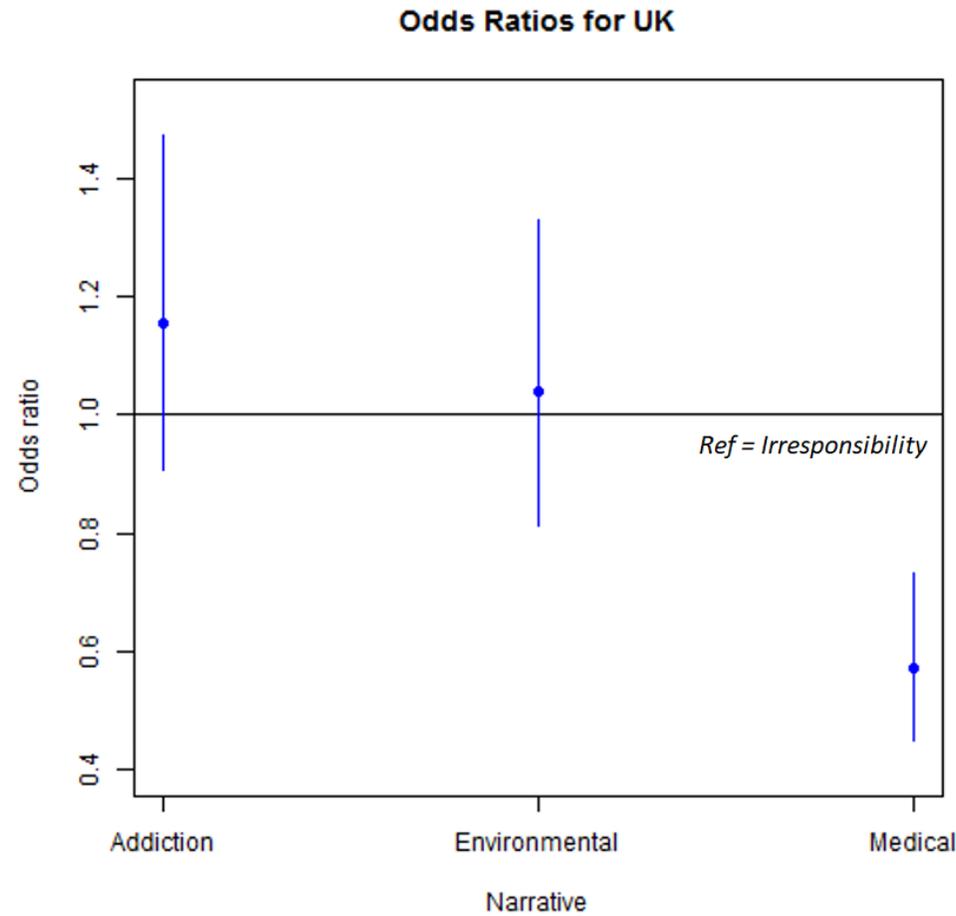


# Belief in the “Addiction” Explanation Was Especially Strong in Brazil, CA-Fr, and Italy



Note: Odds ratios calculated from cumulative logit models

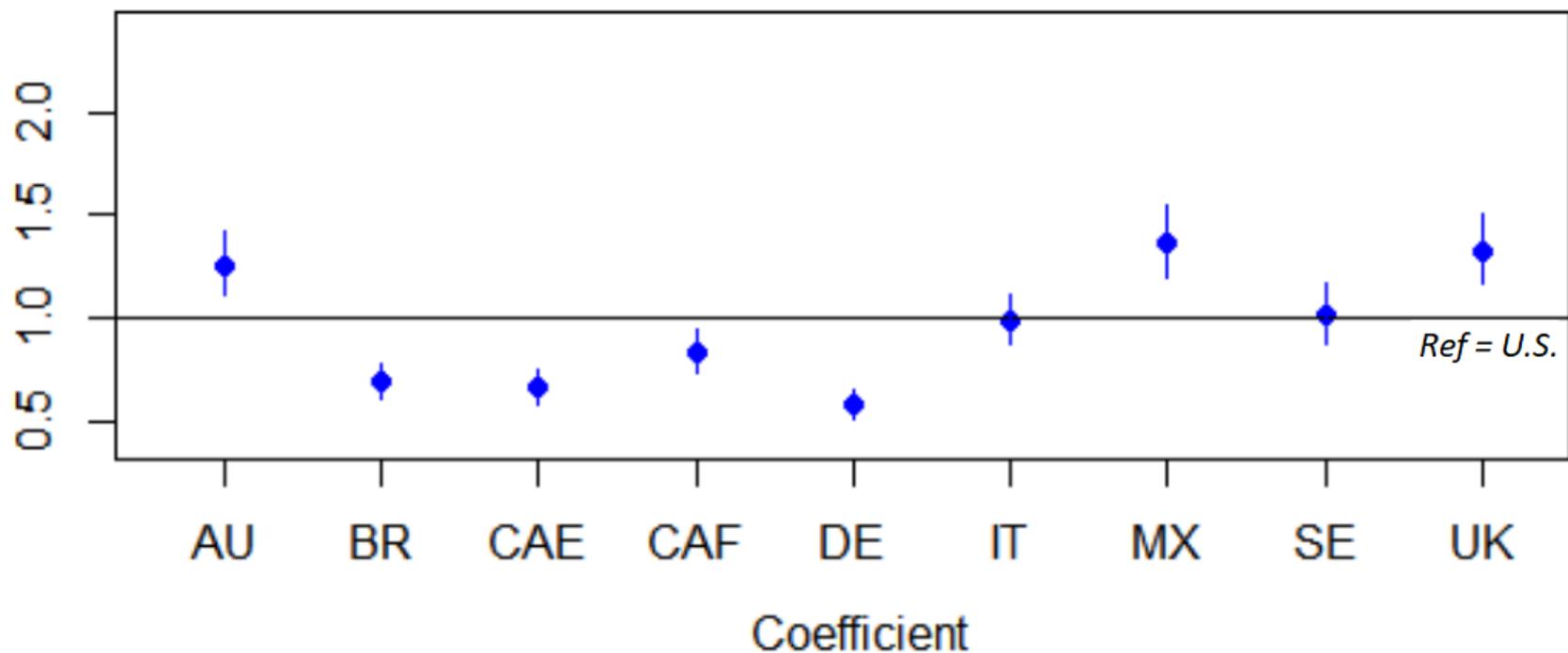
# Only UK and U.S. Respondents Believed in Irresponsibility as Much as Other Explanations



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](http://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-TOS-EASO-Symposium.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

