

Obesity: Changing the Narrative in the Media

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April 10, 2019

Disclosures

- **Professional fees**
 - 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

Presentation Objectives

- Describe the gap between the reality of obesity and media narratives
- Identify ways to change the narrative



Source: Pawel Loj / flickr

Misrepresentation of Obesity and the People Affected

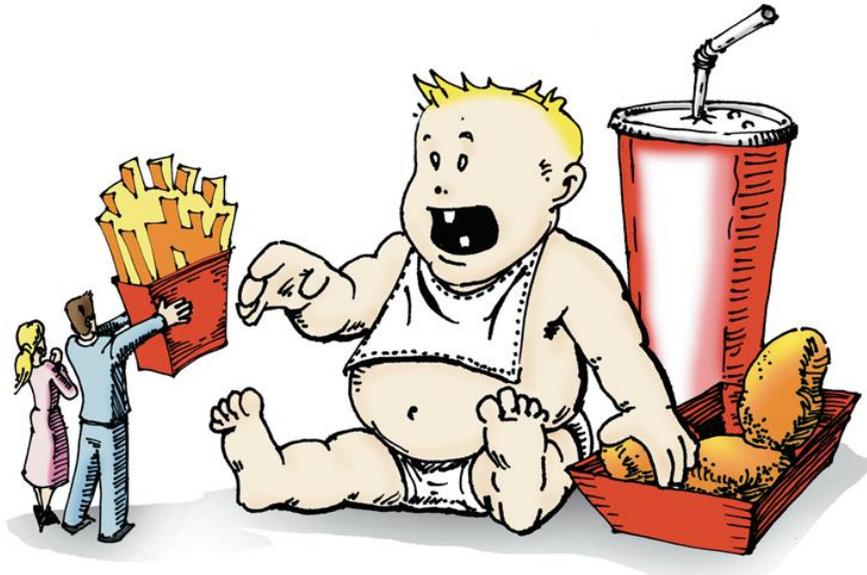
- Degrading images
- Stereotypical portrayals
- False information regarding
 - The disease
 - Treatment and prevention



Having a Whale of a Time, photograph © Mr TGT / flickr

Degrading Images Are the Norm

- Butts and guts
- Dehumanized individuals
- Sad children



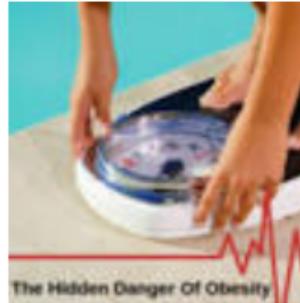
Obesity in Children, illustration © Joe 13 / flickr



Jeans, photograph © Sandra Cohen-Rose / flickr

False Information About Obesity

- Sensationalism
- Catastrophizing narratives
- Myths about causes



The Hidden Danger of **Obesity**

Psychology Today (blog) - 15 hours ago

Overeating can lead to **obesity** and this increases your risk for many medical diseases (for example: diabetes and high blood pressure).



You can't blame the military for your fat ass, according to a new VA ruling

Task & Purpose - Apr 8, 2019

For example, you may be rated 40% because of Agent Orange related diabetes but the diabetes may **cause obesity** so you may be able to get ...

WebMD

HEALTH
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DRUGS &
SUPPLEMENTS

LIVING
HEALTHY

Skip Breakfast, Get Fat

Brain Craves High-Calorie Foods When You Skip Breakfast, Study Shows

By Kelli Miller

Misinformation About Obesity Treatment

- Sensational and atypical diet and exercise stories
- Depiction of evidence-based treatment as “the easy way out”



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'Blue Bloods': Why Fans Are Angry with the Show's Portrayal of Gastric Bypass

Nicole Weaver | [MORE ARTICLES](#)

April 8, 2019

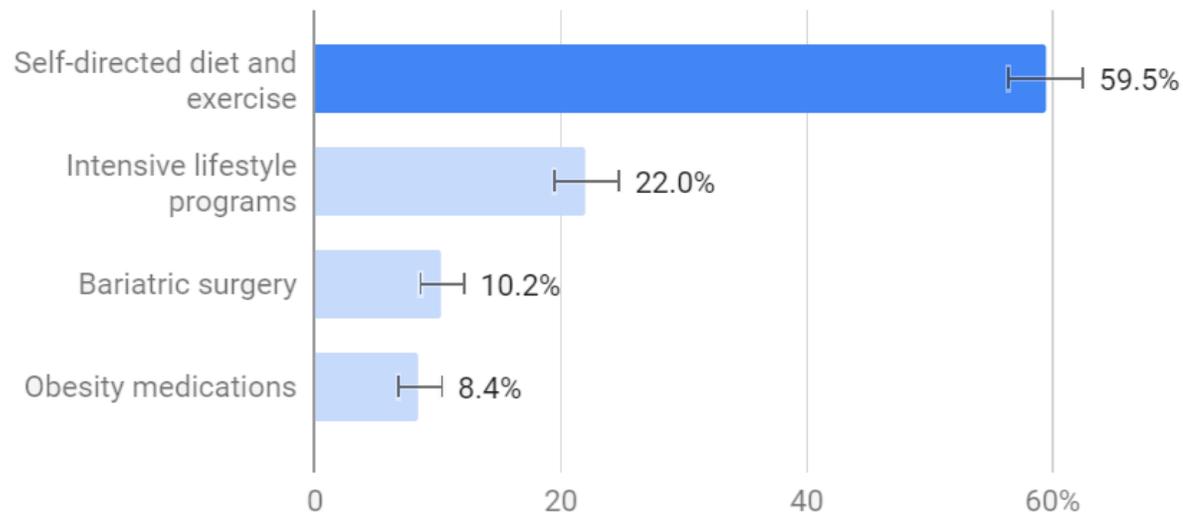
Result:

Unrealistic Expectations for Obesity Self-Help

Obesity Treatments - U.K.

1. Which of the following treatments for obesity is most effective?

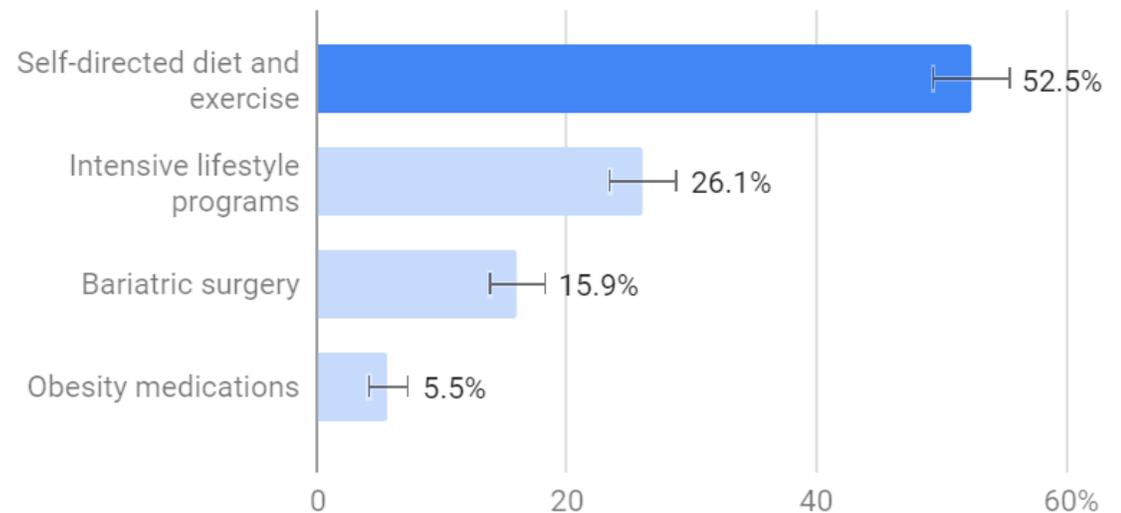
766 respondents



Obesity Treatments - U.S.

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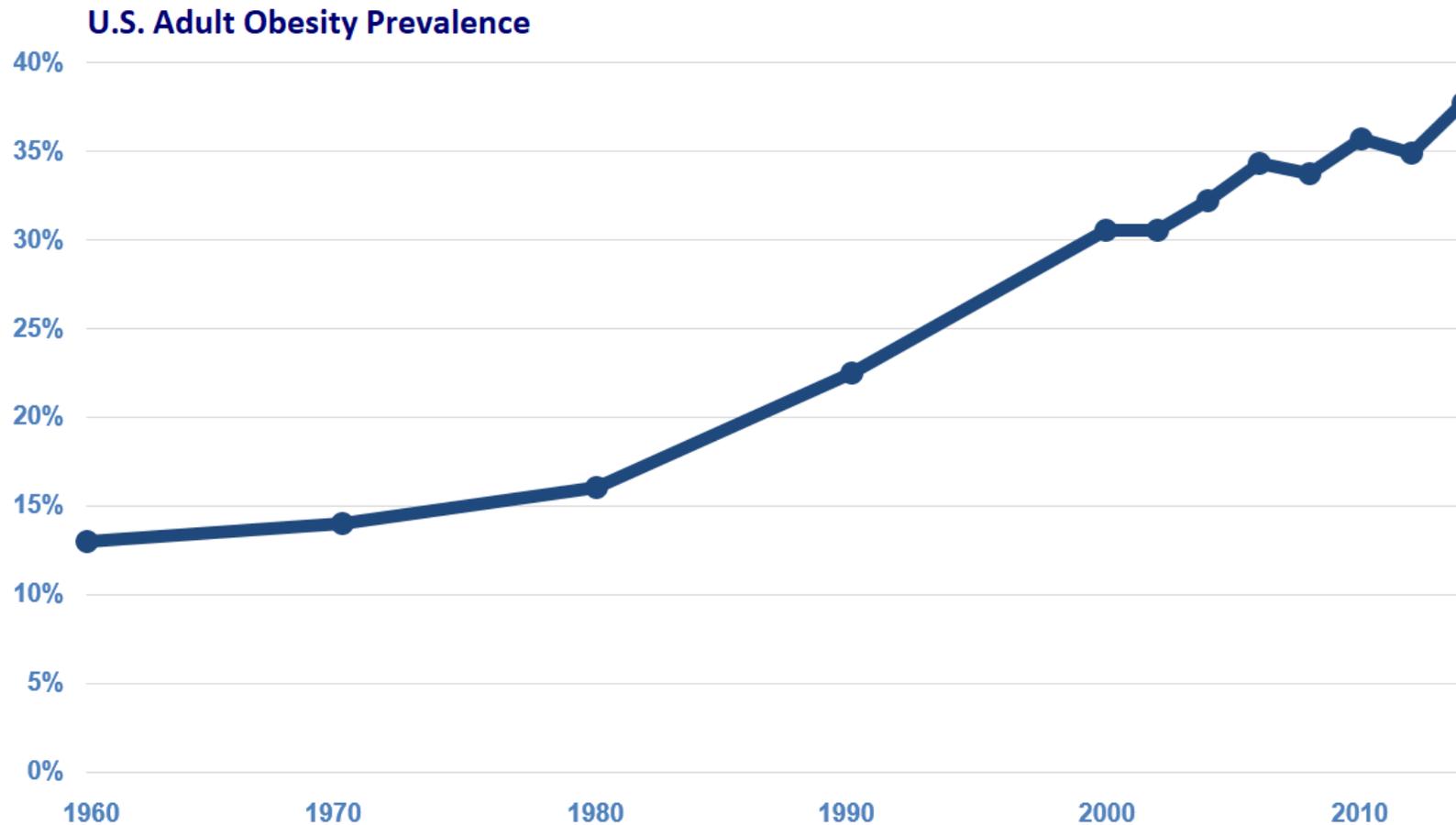
776 respondents



Misinformation About Prevention



The Result: A Relentless Rise in Obesity Prevalence



Source: NHANES estimates

Cancer and Obesity: The Challenge of Prevention and Treatment

How Can We Change the Media Narrative?

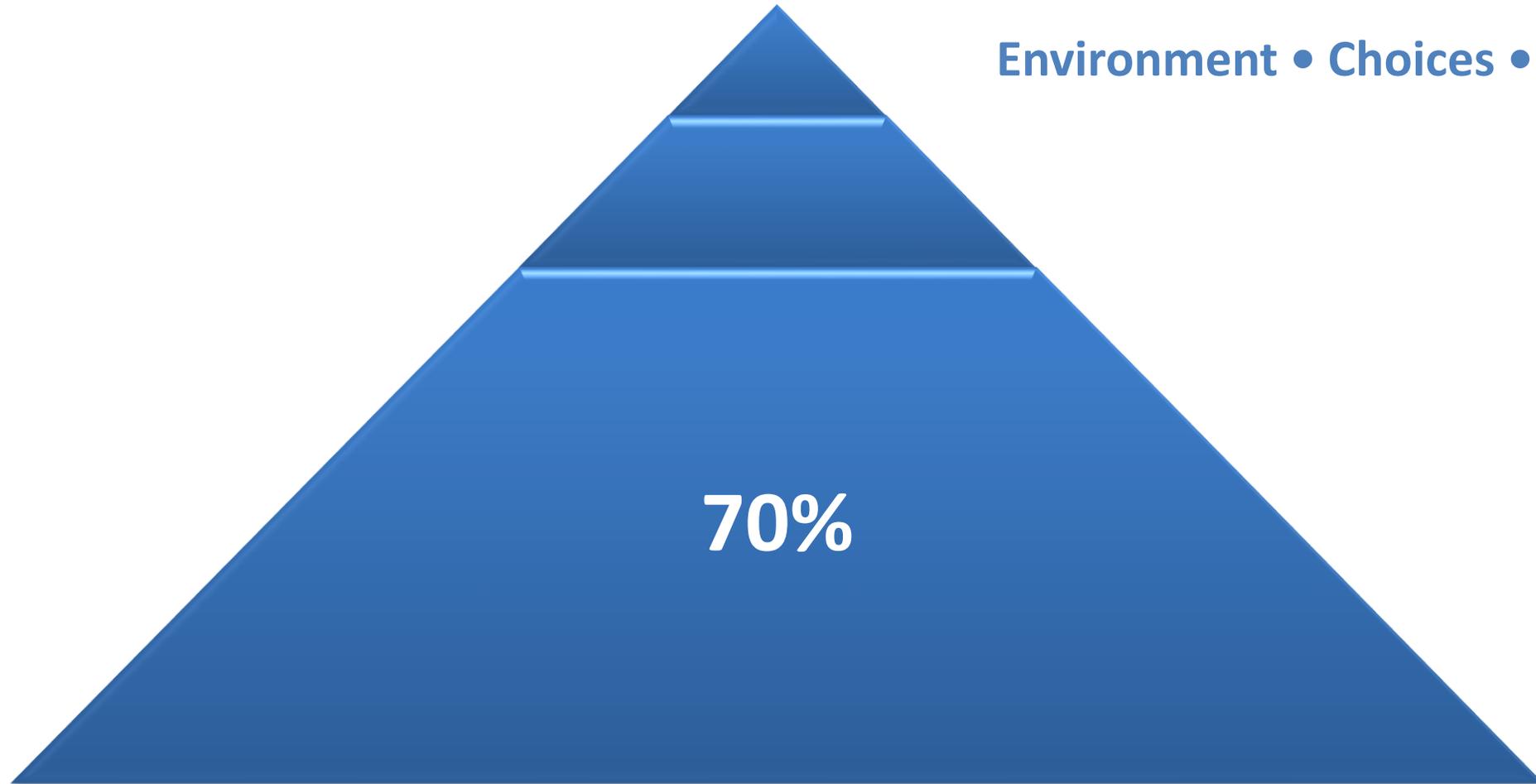
Three Things Are Critical

- Provide facts to counter myths
- Put a human face on obesity
- Vigorous, persistent advocacy



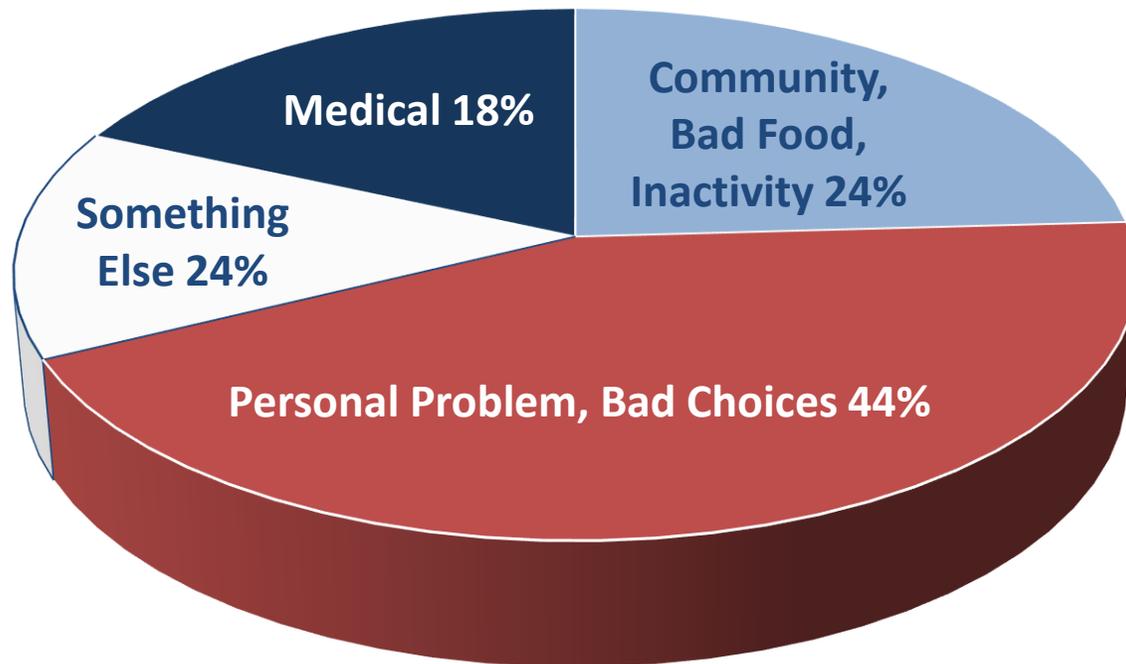
Source: OAC Image Gallery

Counter the Bias that Obesity Is Simply the Result of Poor Choices



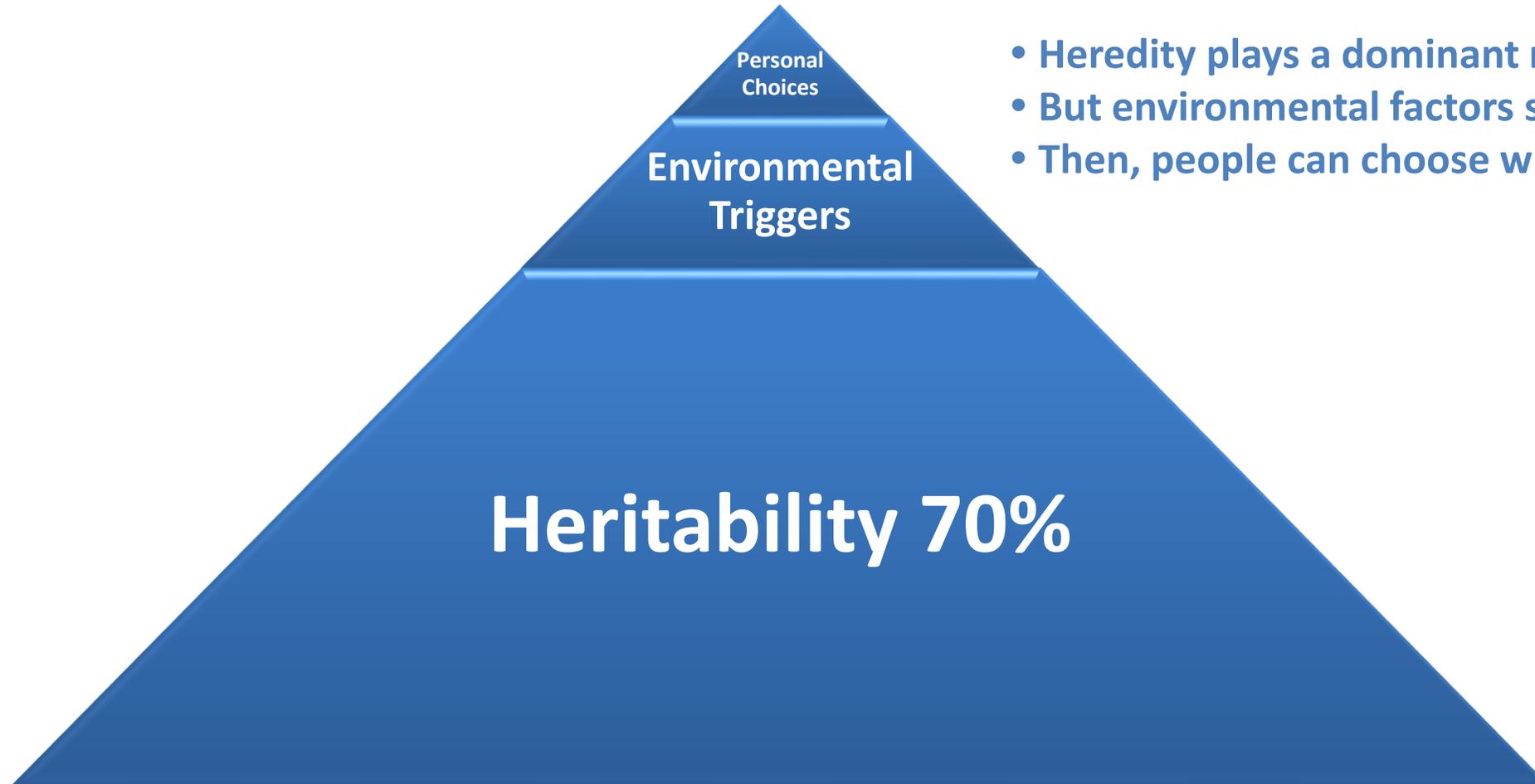
Long Viewed as a Matter of Choice

“Which phrase comes closest to describing the type of problem that you think obesity is?” (Feb 2013)



- **Bad personal choices was the dominant explanation in 2013**
- **Data from ongoing tracking**
- **Respondents asked to pick one**

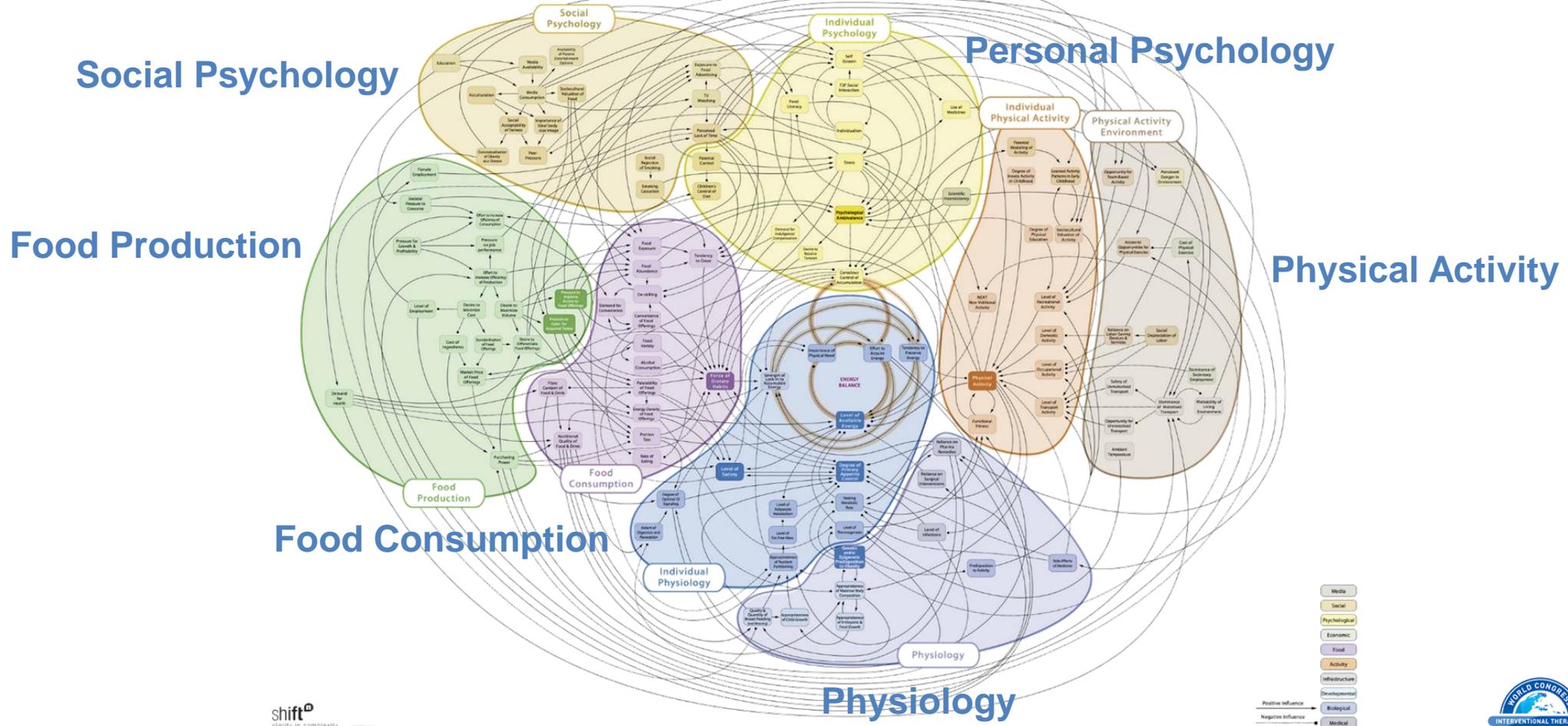
The Truth Is That Obesity Is a Highly Heritable Chronic Disease



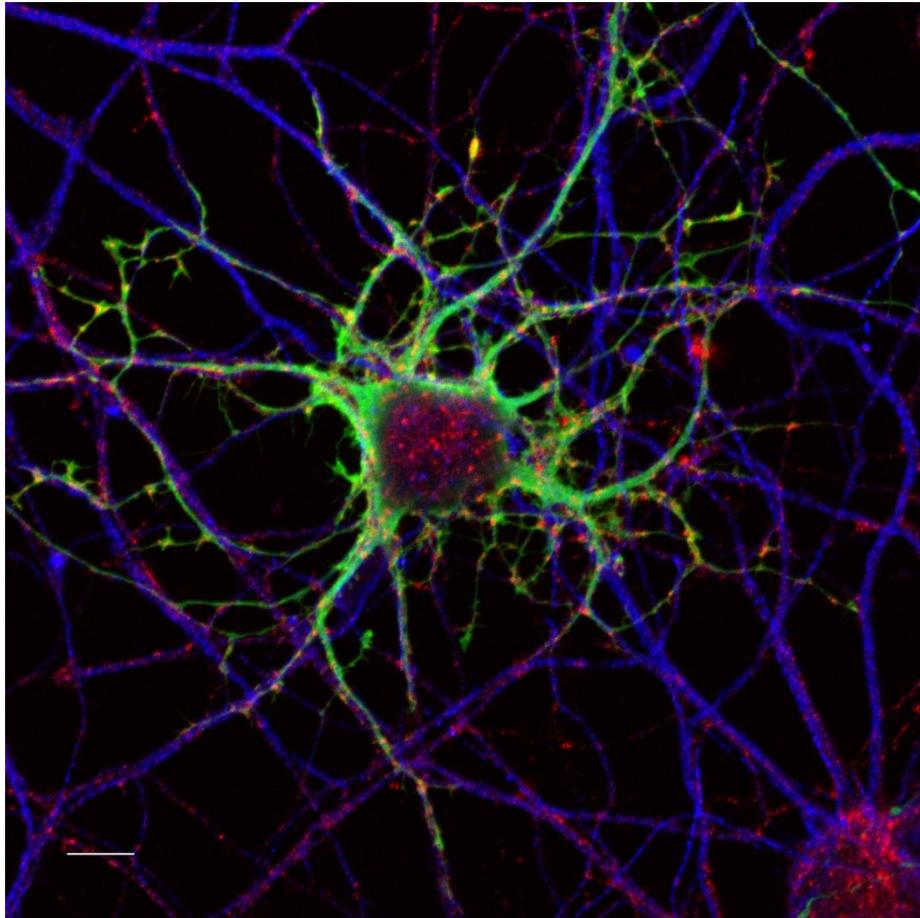
- Heredity plays a dominant role in obesity risk
- But environmental factors serve to activate it
- Then, people can choose what to do about it

Help People Understand the Complexity of Obesity

Obesity System Map
Variable Clusters



Obesity Science Is Bringing Better Insights and Solutions



Neurons, photograph © ZEISS Microscopy / flickr

- Hypothalamus controls fat mass and blood sugar
- More therapies to manage obesity
- Bariatric surgery extends life and puts diabetes in remission

Put a Human Face on Obesity

The New York Times

Why Do Obese Patients Get Worse Care? Many Doctors Don't See Past the Fat

By GINA KOLATA SEPT. 25, 2016



Sarah Bramlette, who advocates awareness of

You must lose weight, a doctor told Sarah Bramlette, advising a 1,200-calorie-a-day diet. But Ms. Bramlette had a basic question: How much do I weigh?

The doctor's scale went up to 350 pounds, and she was heavier than that. If she did not know the number, how would she know if the diet was working?

The doctor had no answer. So Ms. Bramlette, 39, who lived in Ohio at the time, resorted to a solution that made her burn with shame. She drove to a nearby junkyard that had a scale that could weigh her. She was 502 pounds.

One in three Americans is obese, a rate that has been steadily growing for more than two decades, but the health care

Bias compromises the quality of care

- Less empathetic care
- Less preventive care
- Patients feel berated and disrespected
- Obesity blamed for every symptom

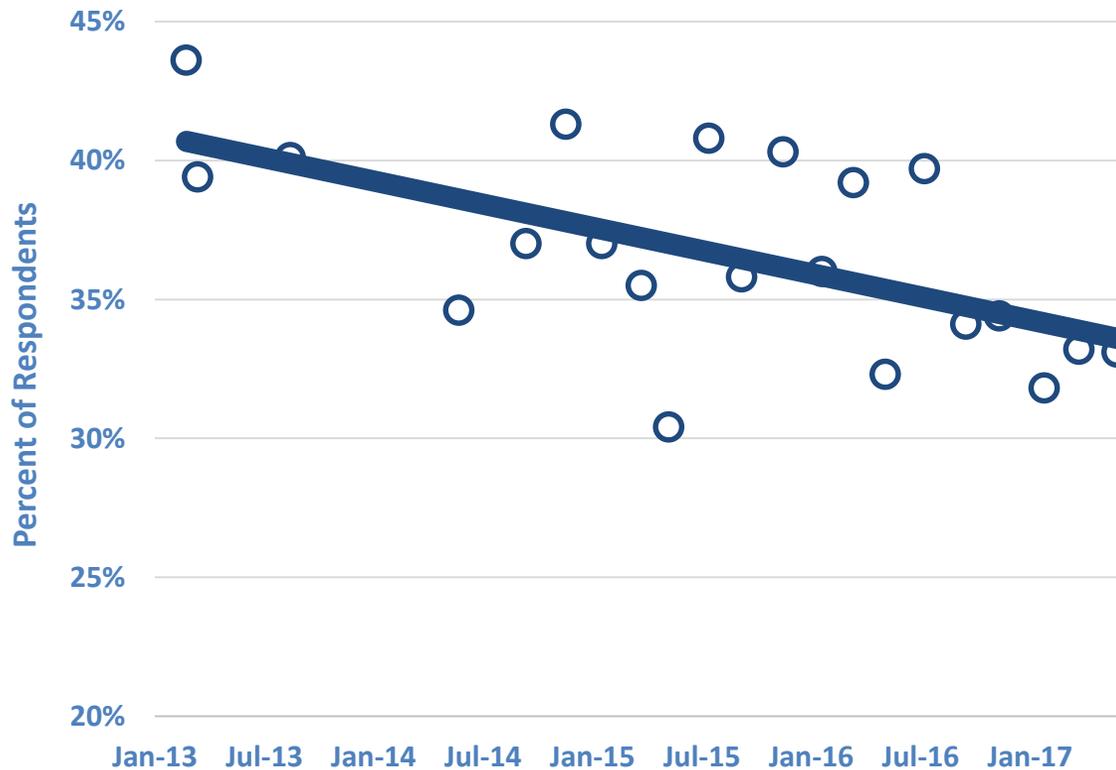
“You could walk in with an ax sticking out of your head and they would tell you your head hurt because you are fat.”

Vigorous, Persistent Advocacy



It's Changing Hearts

“Obesity is a personal problem of bad choices”



- Fewer people think of obesity as a problem of bad personal choices
- People are shifting toward more diverse views of obesity

And It's Changing Minds

Medscape

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COMMENTARY

Retracted -- All Is Lost and I Have No Hope: The Obesity Epidemic

George D. Lundberg, MD

DISCLOSURES | February 15, 2019

76 Read Comments



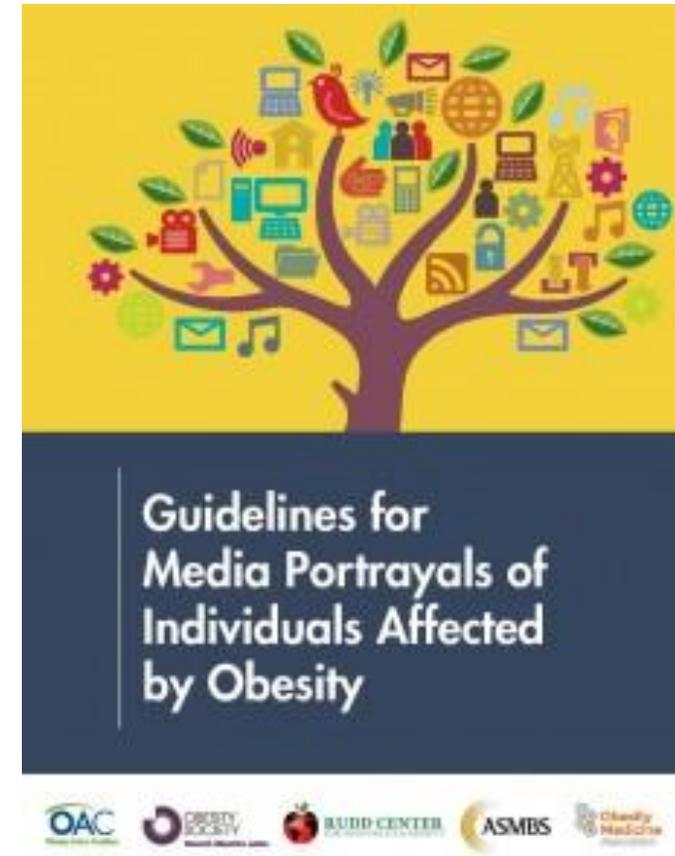
+ ADD TO EMAIL ALERTS

Editor's Note (February 22, 2019): Medscape values a diverse range of opinions on issues relevant to the medical community.

While we welcome thought-provoking and even controversial points of view in our commentaries and in comments from our readers, we do not endorse weight bias, nor bias towards any group.

Key Resources

- Media guidelines
- Non-stigmatizing image galleries



What's Required for Change?

Progress will require:

- Objectivity to replace bias
- Curiosity about obesity and the people it affects
- Care for these people



Targets of Opportunity, photograph by Randy Robertson / flickr

More Information



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