

LBP-126 Indications That Explicit Bias about Obesity May Be Declining More in the U.S. Than in the U.K.

Theodore K Kyle¹, Gwyn Cready³, Diana M Thomas⁴, Krista Watts⁴, Joseph Nadglowski²

¹ConscienHealth, Pittsburgh, United States

²Obesity Action Coalition, Tampa, United States

³CreadyCo, Pittsburgh, United States

⁴United States Military Academy, West Point, United States

OBJECTIVES

Weight bias is an important source of harm to people with obesity (PwO) and a barrier to progress in reducing its health impact. It is common for the public to fault PwO for having the condition and to reject the idea that it is a medical problem rather than a matter of choice. Prior research has shown that these attitudes are stronger in the U.K. than in the U.S.(1)

MATERIALS-METHODS

Random samples of 6,082 adults completed anonymous, voluntary online surveys in November 2017 and May 2020. Total respondents were divided evenly between the two time periods, with each respondent answering only one question administered randomly by Google Surveys. Participants indicated their agreement (using 5-point Likert scales) with one of three different statements: that obesity is the fault of PwO, that it is not their fault, or that obesity is a problem because PwO are blamed for the disease instead of receiving needed medical help.

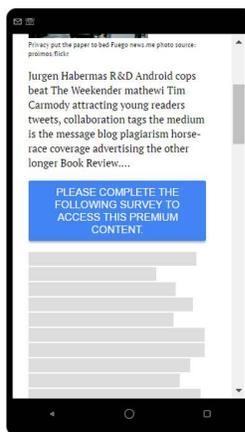
To assess differences between the U.S. and the U.K. and over time, odds ratios were estimated using proportional odds cumulative logit models. All models adjusted for gender and age in addition to country, year, and an interaction effect for country x year.

Figure 1

Web and Smartphone Samples Obtained via Google Consumer Surveys

Sample Size

- 6,082 total
- U.S. and U.K
- Fielded in Nov 2017 and May 2020



Representative samples of U.S. and U.K. adults were obtained through Google Surveys in Nov 2017 and May 2020

RESULTS

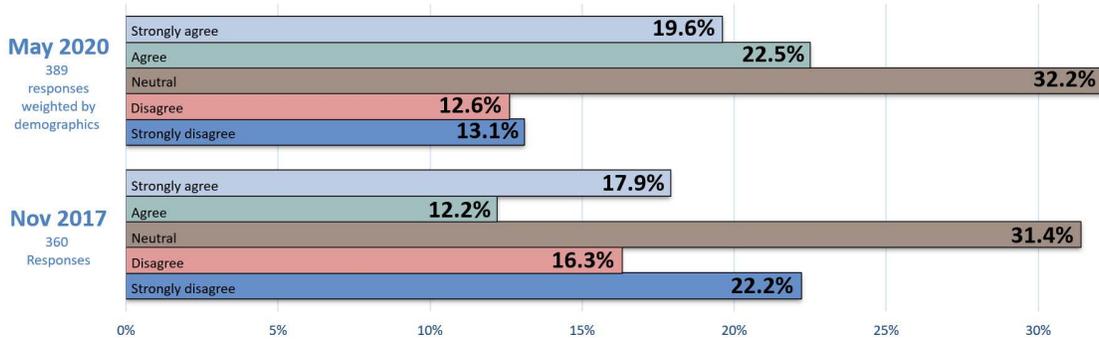
The proportion of U.S. respondents who agree that obesity is the fault of PwO trended down from 31% to 25% ($p=0.101$). Among U.K. respondents, that proportion trended down from 34% to 30% ($p=0.283$). For the reverse form of the question, the portion of U.S. respondents agreeing that obesity is not the fault of PwO trended up from 11% to 16% ($p=0.163$). But in the U.K., the number declined 16% to 15%, a change that was not statistically significant ($p=0.307$). When asked about a medical explanation for obesity, the percent of U.S. respondents in agreement rose significantly, from 30% to 42% ($p=0.001$). But among U.K. respondents, that percentage remained unchanged at 31%.

The proportion of U.S. respondents who agreed with a medical explanation for obesity in 2020 was significantly higher in the U.S. than the U.K. ($p=0.002$). U.S. respondents were also more likely than U.K. respondents in 2020 to agree that obesity is not the fault of people who have it ($p=0.007$).

Figure 2

Agreement with a Medical Narrative for Obesity Grew Between 2017 and 2020 in the U.S.

How strongly do you agree or disagree? "Obesity is such a big problem because too many people get blamed for this disease instead of getting the medical help they need."



A proportional odds cumulative logit model demonstrates that differences between 2020 and 2017 responses are significant, $p=0.001$.

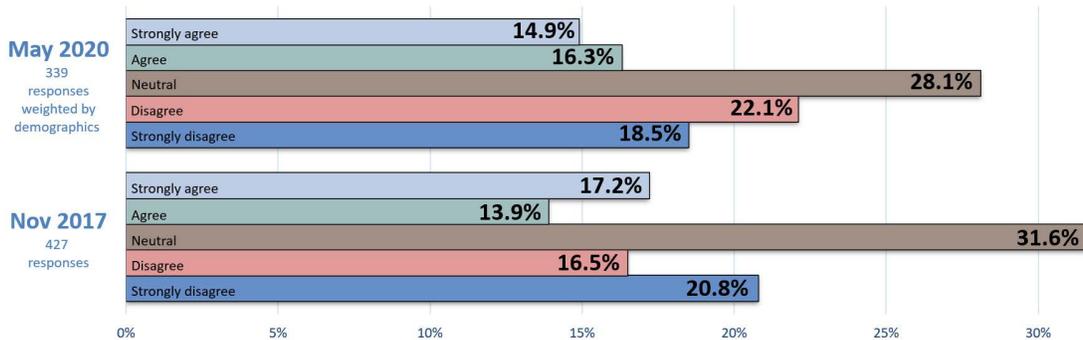


Results demonstrate a significant shift in U.S. public perceptions about a medical narrative for obesity between 2017 and 2020.

Figure 3

Agreement with a Medical Narrative Did Not Grow in the U.K.

How strongly do you agree or disagree? "Obesity is such a big problem because too many people get blamed for this disease instead of getting the medical help they need."



A proportional odds cumulative logit model demonstrates that differences between 2020 and 2017 U.K. responses are not significant, $p=0.801$. 2020 U.S. vs U.K. differences are significant, $p=0.002$.

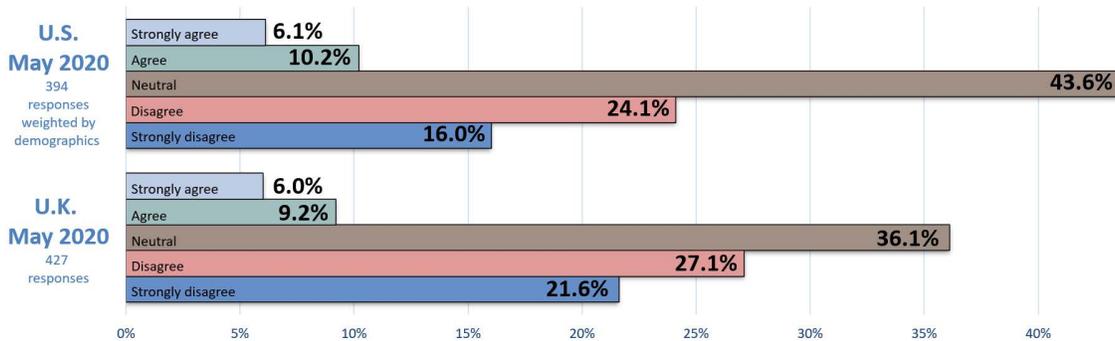


Results indicate that no significant changes in U.K. public perceptions about a medical narrative for obesity occurred between 2017 and 2020. In 2020, U.K. respondents were more likely than U.S. respondents to disagree with a medical narrative.

Figure 4

U.S. Respondents in 2020 Were More Likely Than U.K. to Agree Obesity Is Not the Fault of PwO

How strongly do you agree or disagree? "If a person has obesity, it is not their fault."



A proportional odds cumulative logit model demonstrates that differences between U.S. and U.K. responses are significant, $p=0.007$.



Results demonstrate that U.S. respondents were more likely than U.K. respondents to agree that obesity is not the fault of people who have it.

CONCLUSIONS

These data suggest that explicit bias to favor blaming PwO for their condition may be declining in the U.S. and that acceptance of a medical narrative for obesity may be increasing. However, these changes are less evident in the U.K.

REFERENCES

1. Kyle, T. K., Nadglowski, J., Ramos Salas, X., Thomas, D. M., Puhl, R. M., & Watts, K. (2018). A comparative analysis of explicit weight bias in the UK and eight other countries. In European Congress on Obesity (ECO2018): 25th Congress, Vienna, May 2018. Basel, CH: Karger. doi:10.1159/isbn.978-3-318-06378-3