

How Public Perceptions, Attitudes, and Stigma Can Override Evidence-Based Clinical Guidelines

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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 how bias corrupts our response to obesity and its complications
- Review data on public perceptions and biases about:
 - Obesity
 - Metabolic surgery

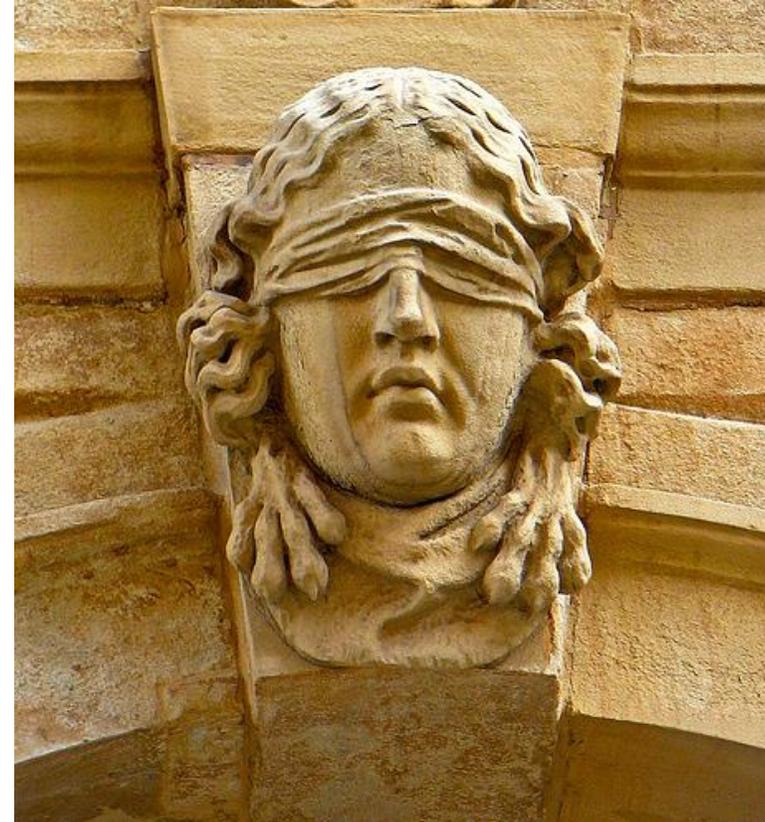


Source: Pawel Loj / flickr

Why Is the Utilization of Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery So Low?

Two primary factors

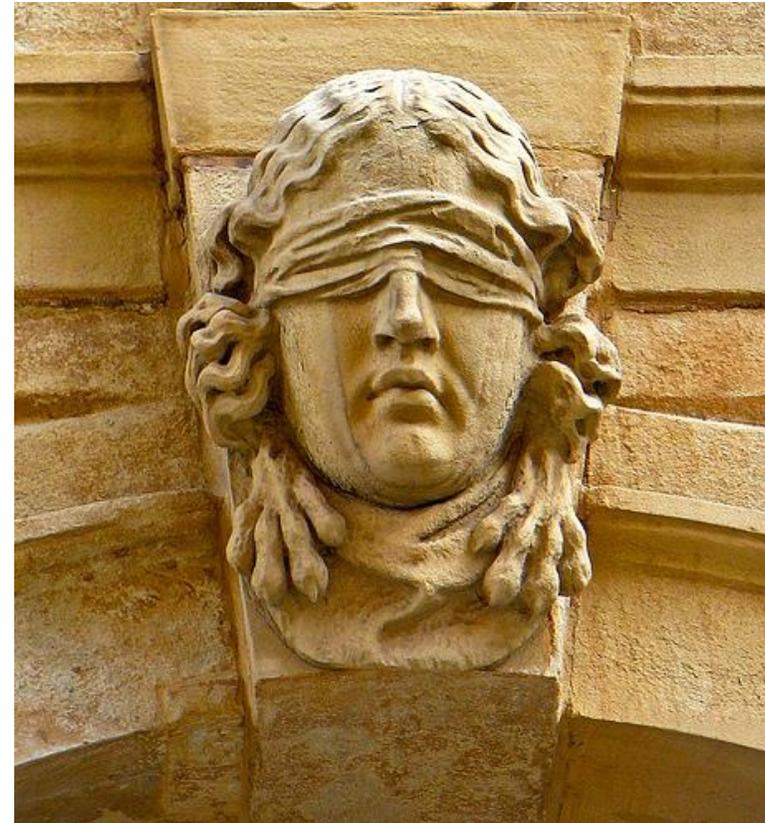
- Fear of surgery
- Bias about
 - Obesity
 - People living with it
 - Obesity treatment



Bias Comes from Selective Blindness to Facts

Bias is an inclination or outlook to present or hold a **partial perspective**, often accompanied by a **refusal to consider** the possible merits of **alternative points of view**. Biases are learned implicitly within cultural contexts. People may develop biases toward or **against** an **individual**, an ethnic **group**, a nation, a religion, a social class, a political party, theoretical **paradigms** and **ideologies** within academic domains, or a species.

– Adapted from
Psychology: Contemporary Perspectives
Paul Okami



Two Kinds of Bias

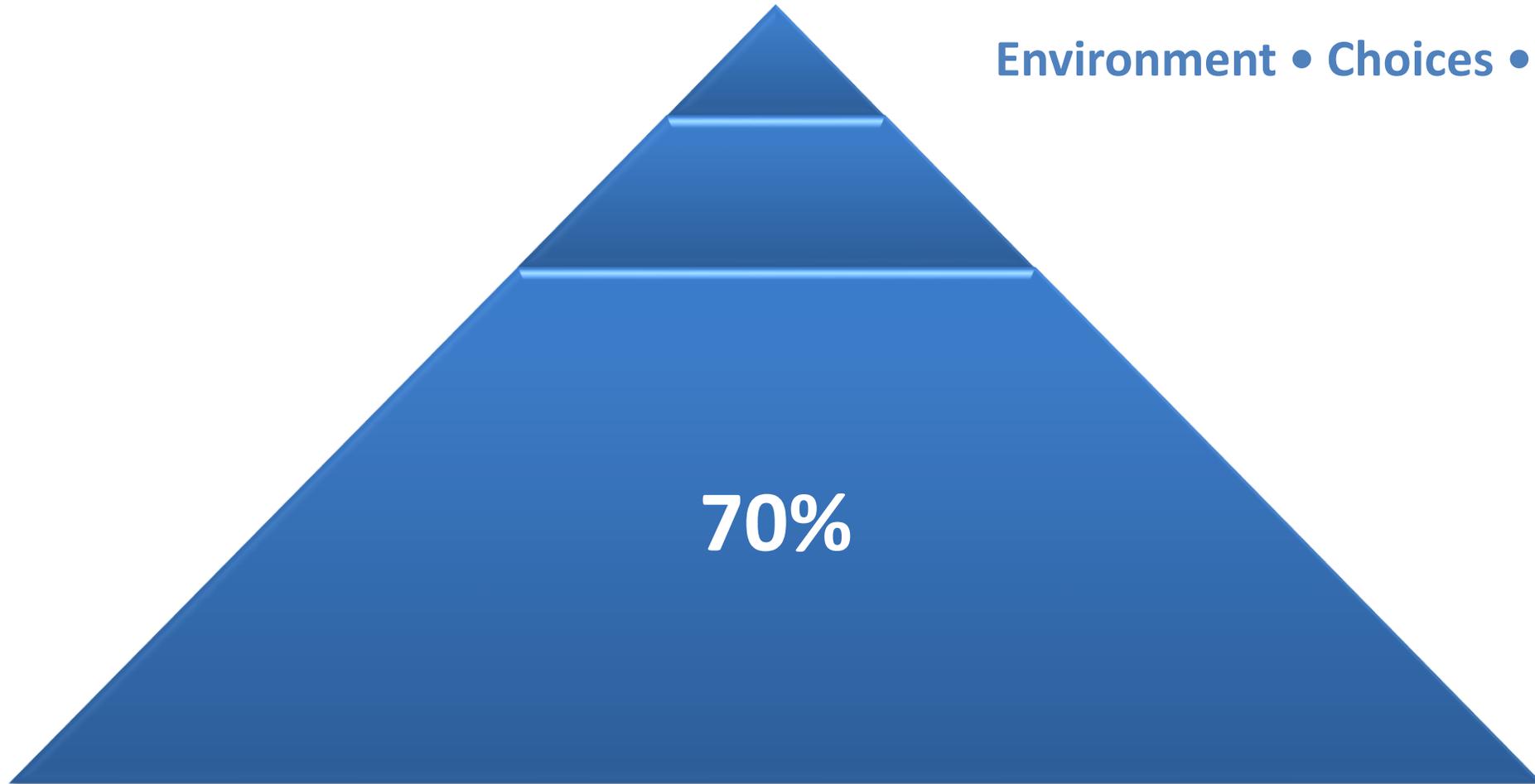
Corrupt Our Response to Obesity

- **Intellectual bias**
favoring personal convictions
- **Weight bias**
directed at people with obesity



God Judging Adam, Etching by William Blake / WikiArt

People Typically View Obesity as the Result of Poor Choices

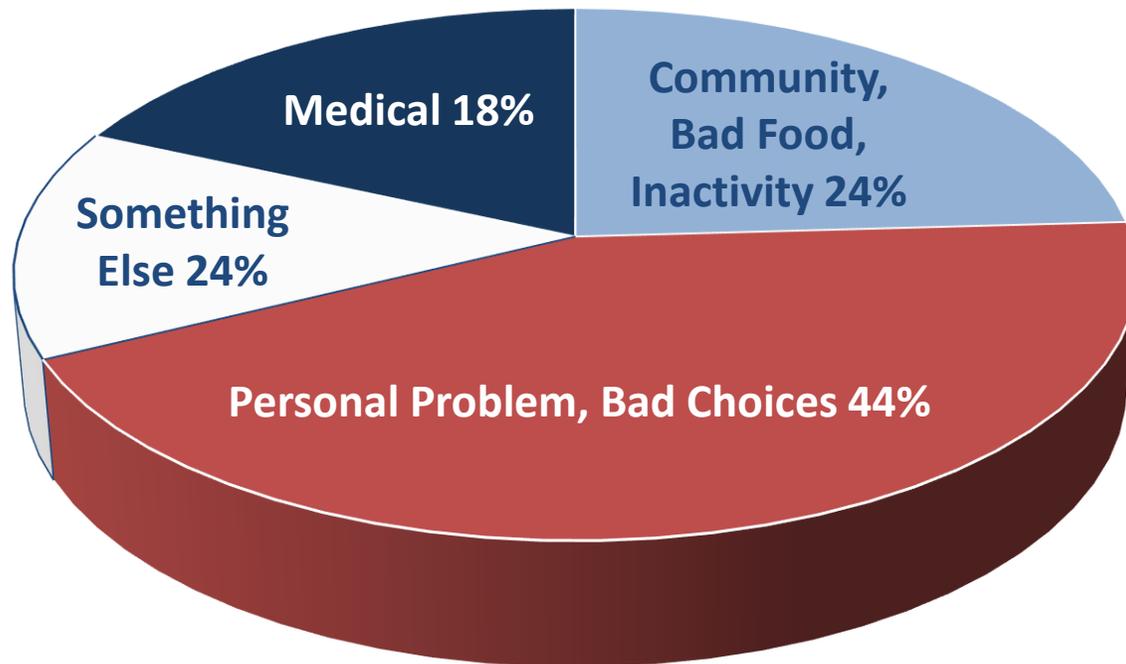


Environment • Choices • Genes

70%

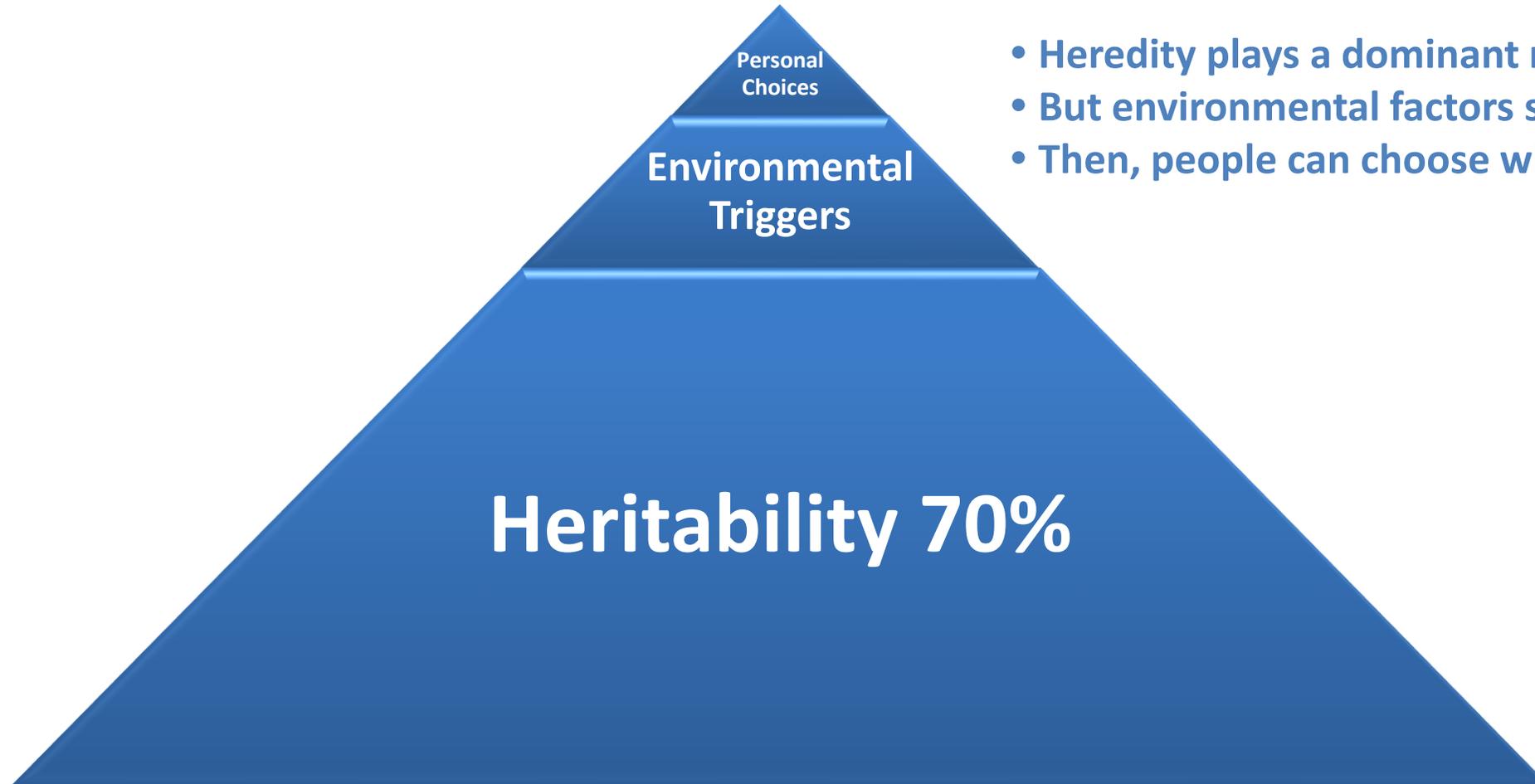
Long Viewed as a Matter of Choice

“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

Isn't Obesity Just the Result of Eating More Calories Than You Burn?

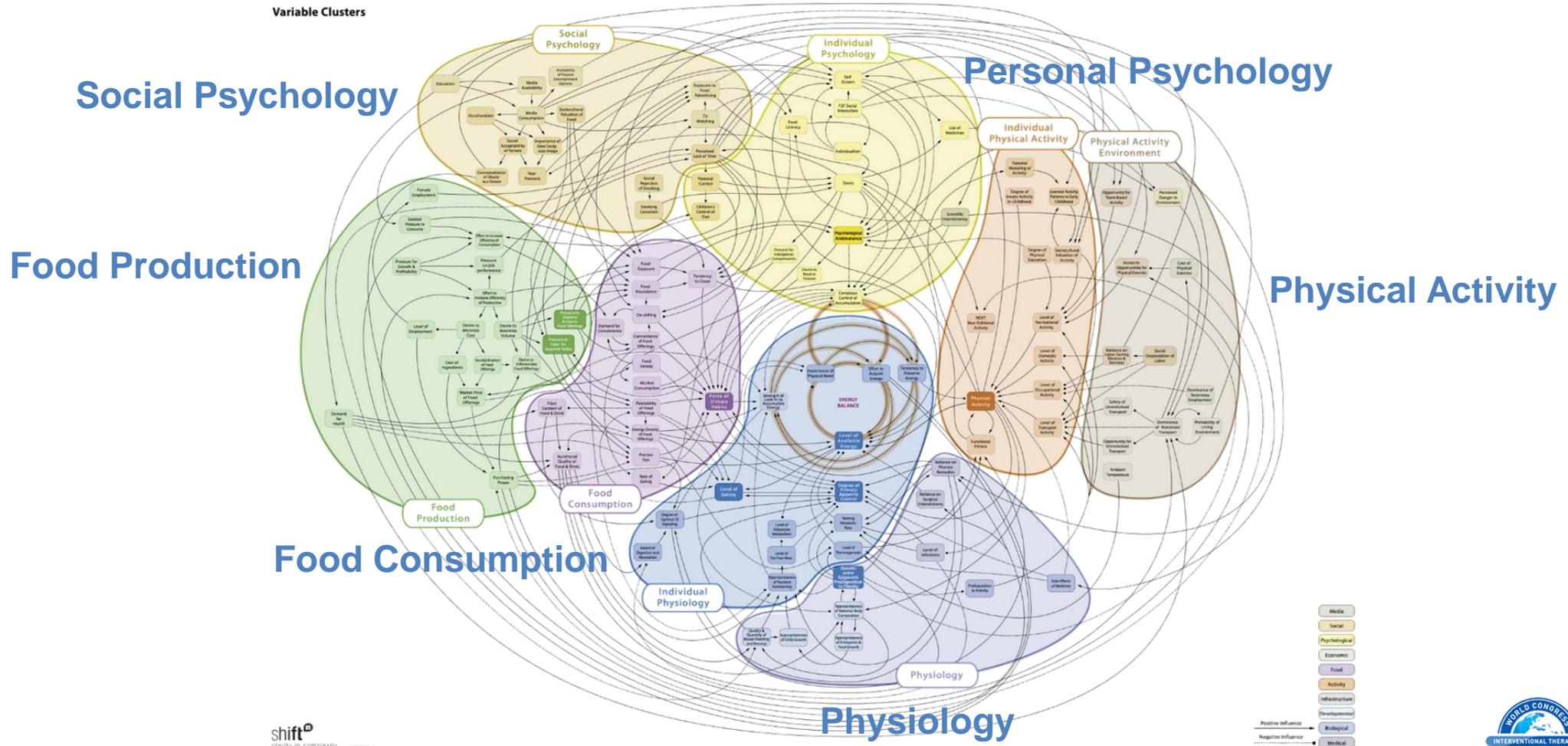


Isn't Obesity Just the Result of Eating More Calories Than You Burn?



Obesity Grows from Complex, Adaptive Systems

Obesity System Map
Variable Clusters



Demeaning Stereotypes About People with Obesity

- Lazy
- Stupid
- Undisciplined
- Sloppy
- Awkward
- Losers
- Dishonest
- Won't follow directions
- Uniformly unhealthy
- Ignorant about nutrition
- Lives spent gorging on junk food

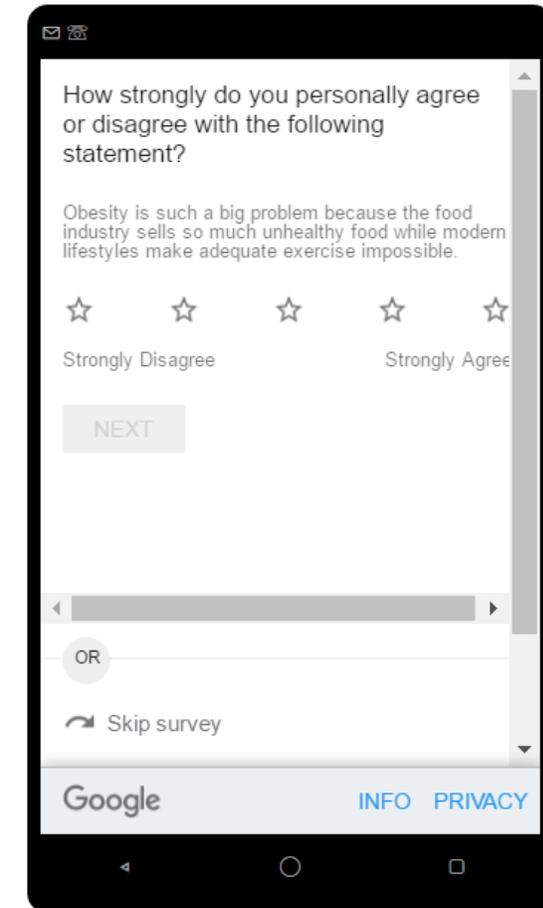
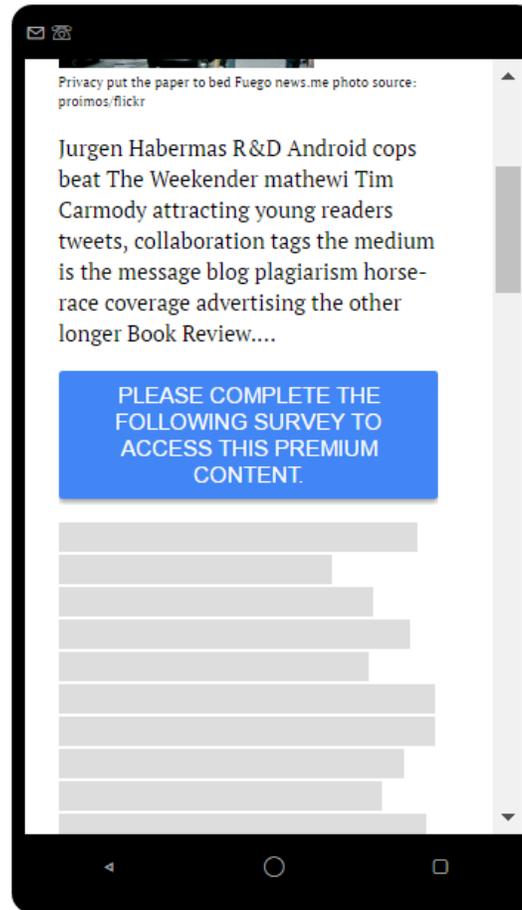


In the Kitchen, photograph © Obesity Action Coalition / OAC Image Gallery

Web and Smartphone Samples Obtained via Google Consumer Surveys

Sample Size

- 3,024 total
- U.S. and U.K
- Fielded in Feb 2019

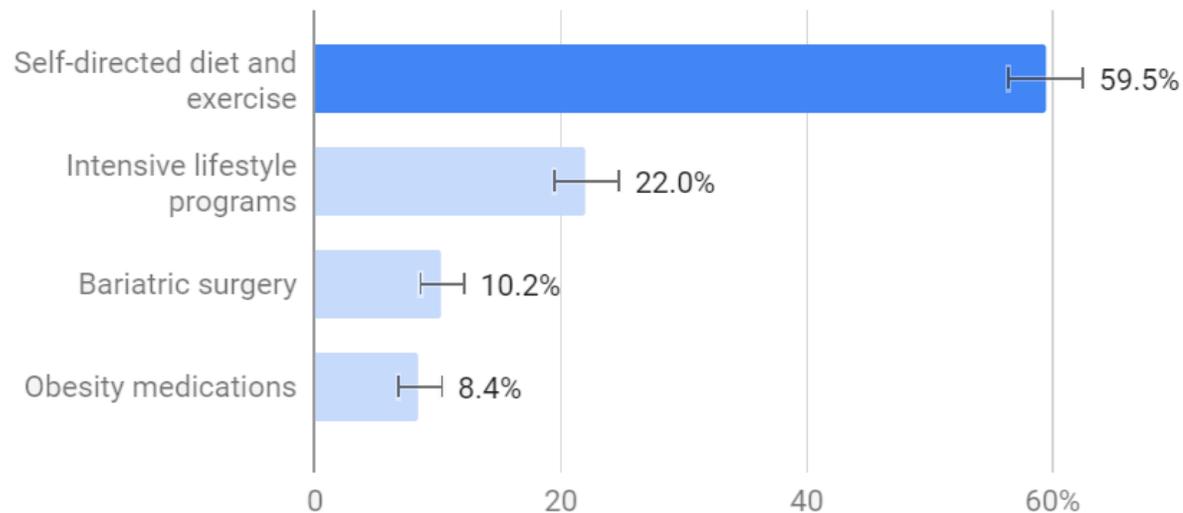


People Have Unrealistic Expectations for Obesity Self-Help

Obesity Treatments - U.K.

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

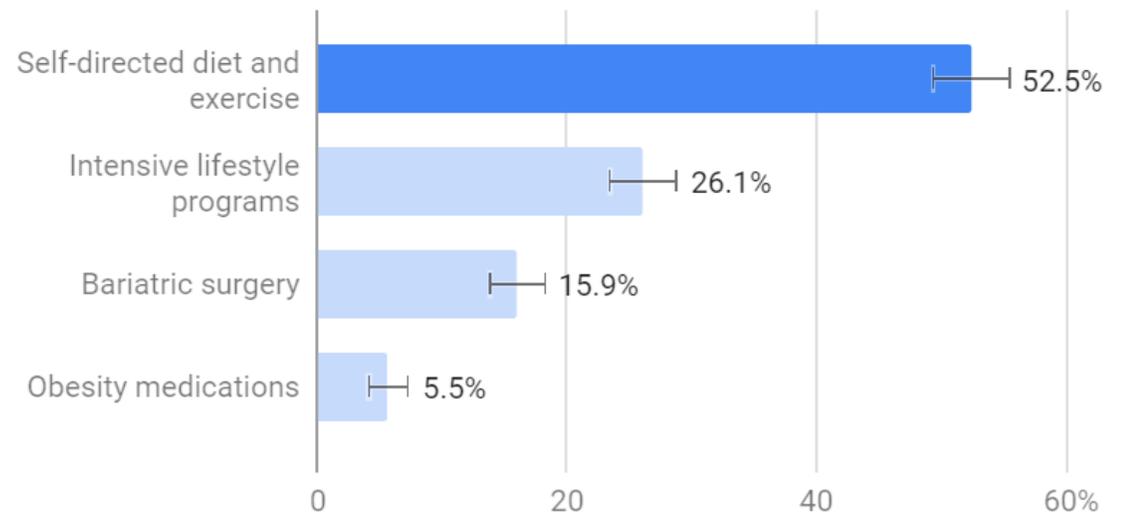
766 respondents



Obesity Treatments - U.S.

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

776 respondents

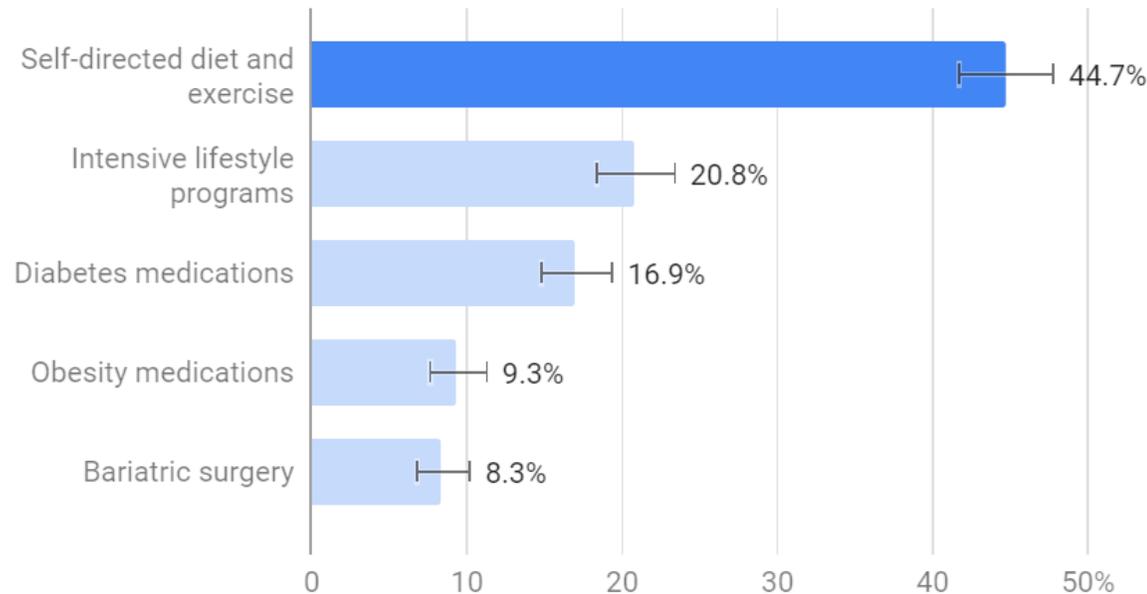


Those Expectations Flow into Ideas About Type 2 Diabetes

Diabetes Treatments - U.K.

1. Which of the following treatments for type 2 diabetes is most effective in people who also have obesity?

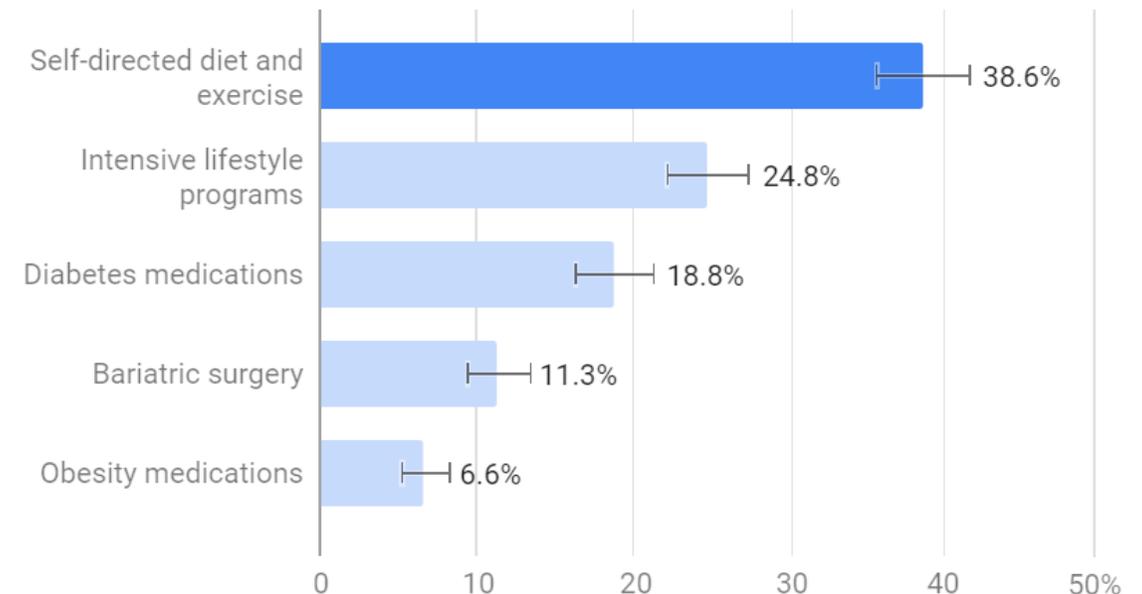
754 respondents



Diabetes Treatments - U.S.

1. Which of the following treatments for type 2 diabetes is most effective in people who also have obesity?

728 respondents



Many People Think Bariatric Surgery Is Simply Too Risky for Them

- Only 32% with class III obesity would even consider surgery
- Most often because they considered it too risky
- Minimization of their own health risks seems to be a factor, too

Brief Cutting Edge Report

CLINICAL TRIALS: BEHAVIOR, PHARMACOTHERAPY, DEVICES, SURGERY

Obesity

The Influence of an Individual's Weight Perception on the Acceptance of Bariatric Surgery

Fatima Cody Stanford¹, Theodore K. Kyle^{2,3}, Mechelle D. Claridy⁴, Joseph F. Nadglowski³, and Caroline M. Apovian⁵

Objective: This study assessed the proportion of US adults with excess weight and obesity who consider bariatric surgery to be appropriate for themselves and how their own weight perception influences this consideration.

Methods: A stratified sample of 920 US adults in June 2014 was obtained through an online survey. The respondents were queried about bariatric surgery acceptability and personal weight perception. Average body mass index (BMI) was determined for each demographic variable, and responses were characterized according to BMI and concordance with perceived weight status. Chi-square analyses served to assess perceived weight concordance in relation to bariatric acceptance.

Results: Only 32% of respondents with Class III obesity indicated that bariatric surgery would be an acceptable option for them, most often because they considered it to be too risky. Respondents with Class III obesity and concordant perception of weight status were more likely ($P < 0.03$) than discordant Class III respondents to accept bariatric surgery. Likewise, concordant respondents with excess weight, but not obesity, were more likely ($P < 0.001$) to correctly consider bariatric surgery to be inappropriate for them.

Conclusions: Despite good safety and efficacy, many persons still believe bariatric surgery is too risky. Weight perception concordance or discordance influences one's decision to consider this treatment option.

Obesity (2014) 00, 1–5. doi:10.1002/oby.20968

This Bias Makes It Easy for Health Plans to Discourage People from Seeking Obesity Care



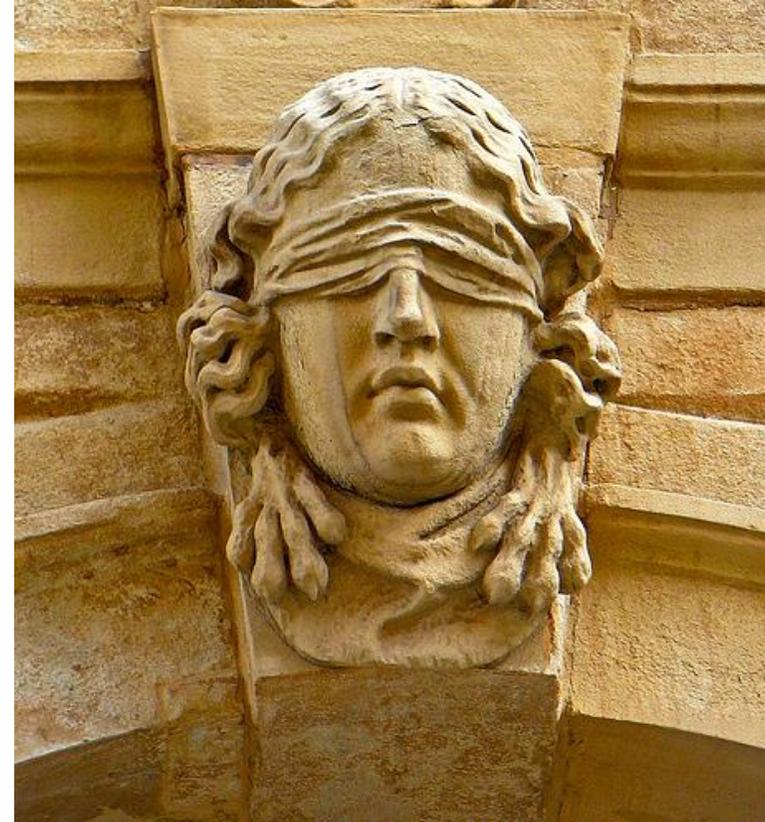
Saving Cash, photograph © 401(K) 2012 / flickr

- Routine policy exclusions for obesity “Regardless of any potential health benefit”
- Lifetime procedure caps
- High out of pocket costs
- Problematic reimbursement rates and procedures
- But, obesity complications are fully covered

Why Is the Utilization of Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery So Low?

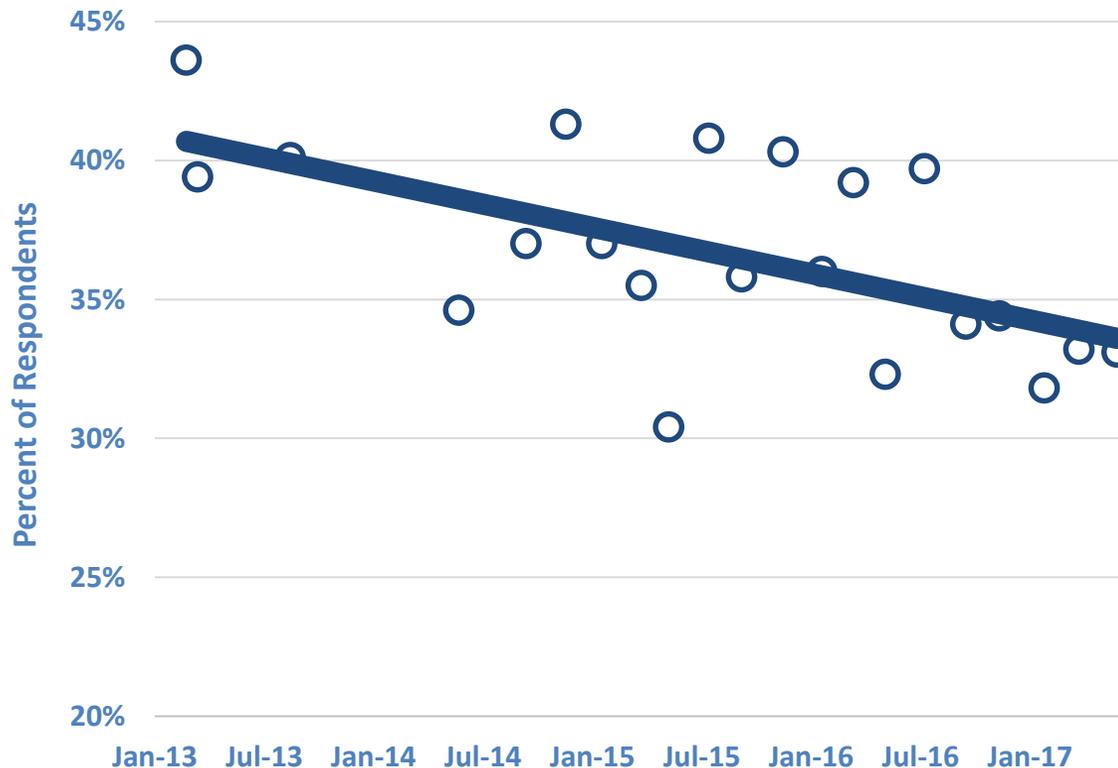
Two primary factors

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Public Views Are Slowly Shifting

“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

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



conscienhealth.org/news



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