

Science Not Stigma: Reporting on Obesity to Inform and Help

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Two Types of Bias Gets in the Way

- **Intellectual bias**
about obesity itself
- **Weight bias**
directed at people with obesity



God Judging Adam, Etching by William Blake / WikiArt

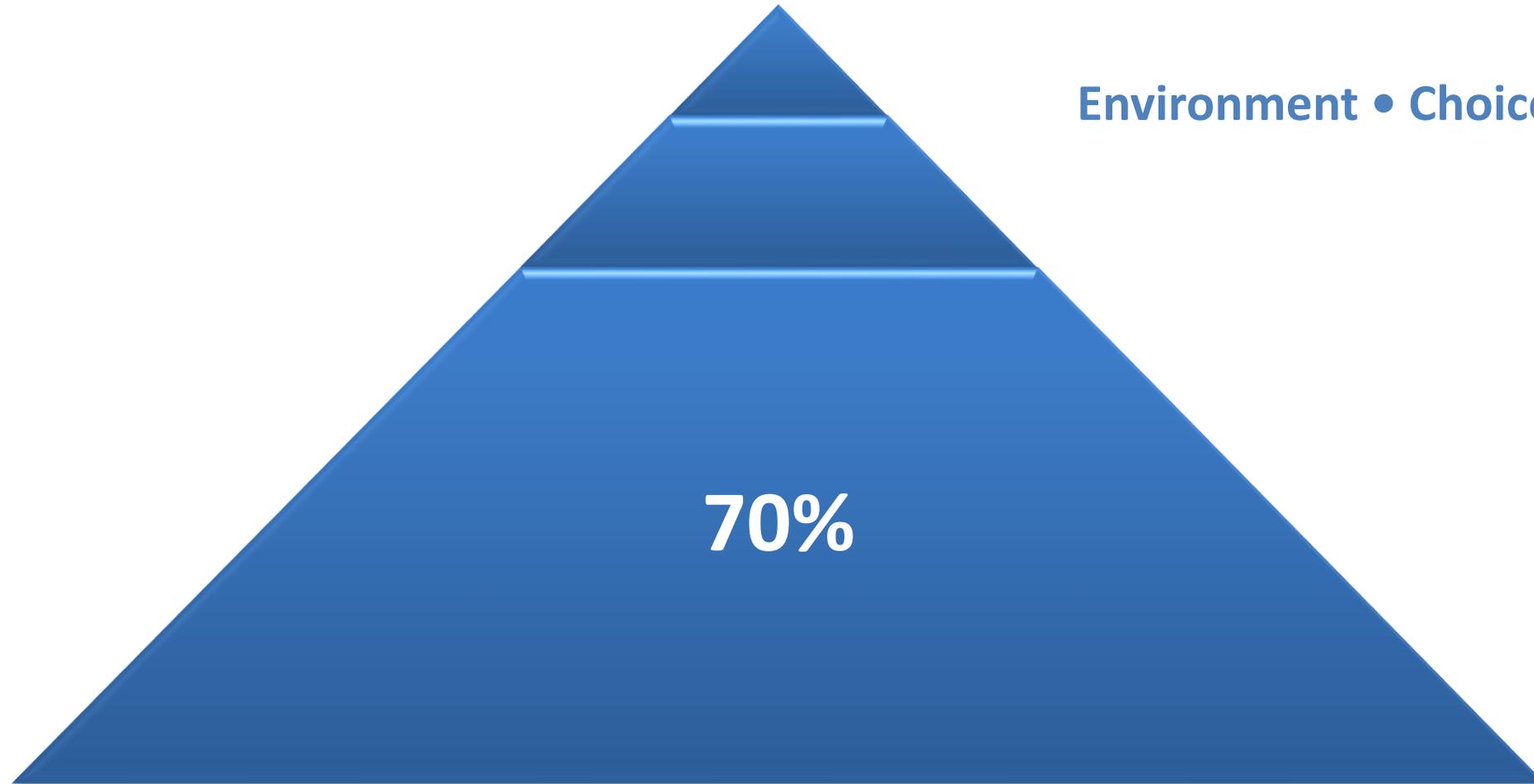
What Is Obesity?

- ~~A heavier than average body?~~
- ~~A high BMI?~~
- Per the World Health Organization:
“Abnormal or excessive fat accumulation that presents a risk to health.”
- A highly stigmatized and misunderstood chronic disease

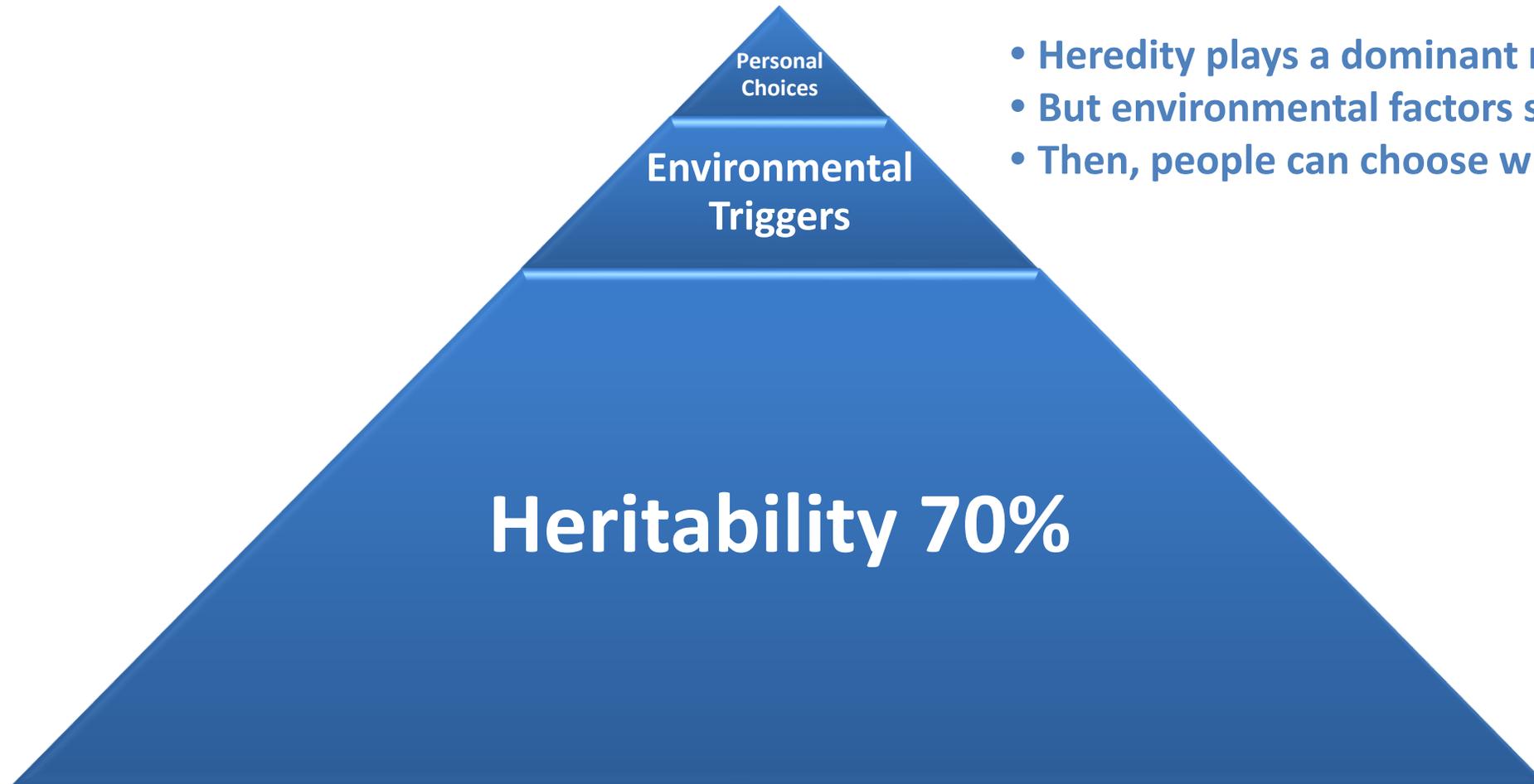


Desk Work, from the OAC Image Gallery, photograph © Obesity Action Coalition

People Typically View Obesity as the Result of Poor Choices



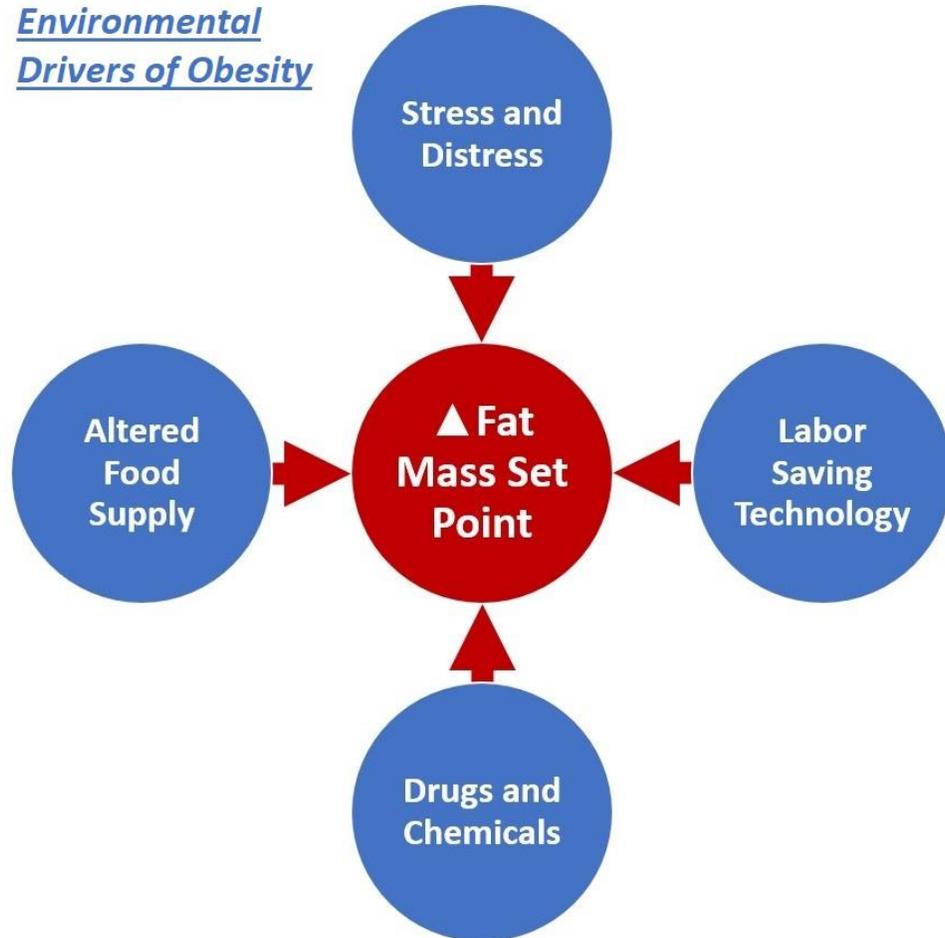
The Truth Is That Obesity Is a Highly Heritable Chronic Disease



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

Ever More Obesity from A Perfect Storm of Environmental Triggers

Environmental Drivers of Obesity



- Simplistic explanations are invariably wrong
- The more accurate view is a perfect storm of multiple factors

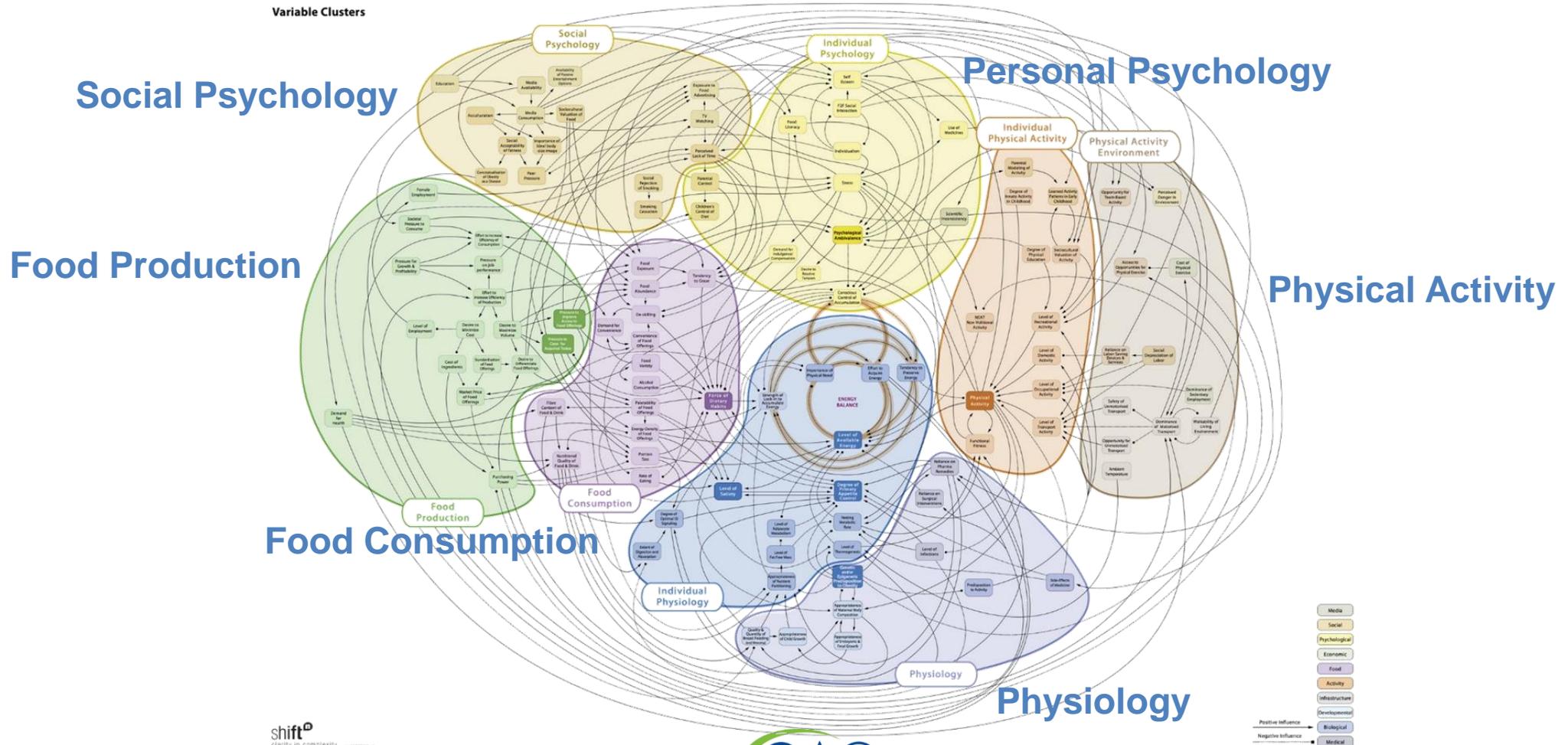
Rocket Science Is Complicated . . .



Space Shuttle Launch, U.S. Navy photo by Chad J. McNeeley / Wikimedia Commons

... But Obesity Is Far More Complex

Obesity System Map
Variable Clusters



Weight Bias Flows from 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

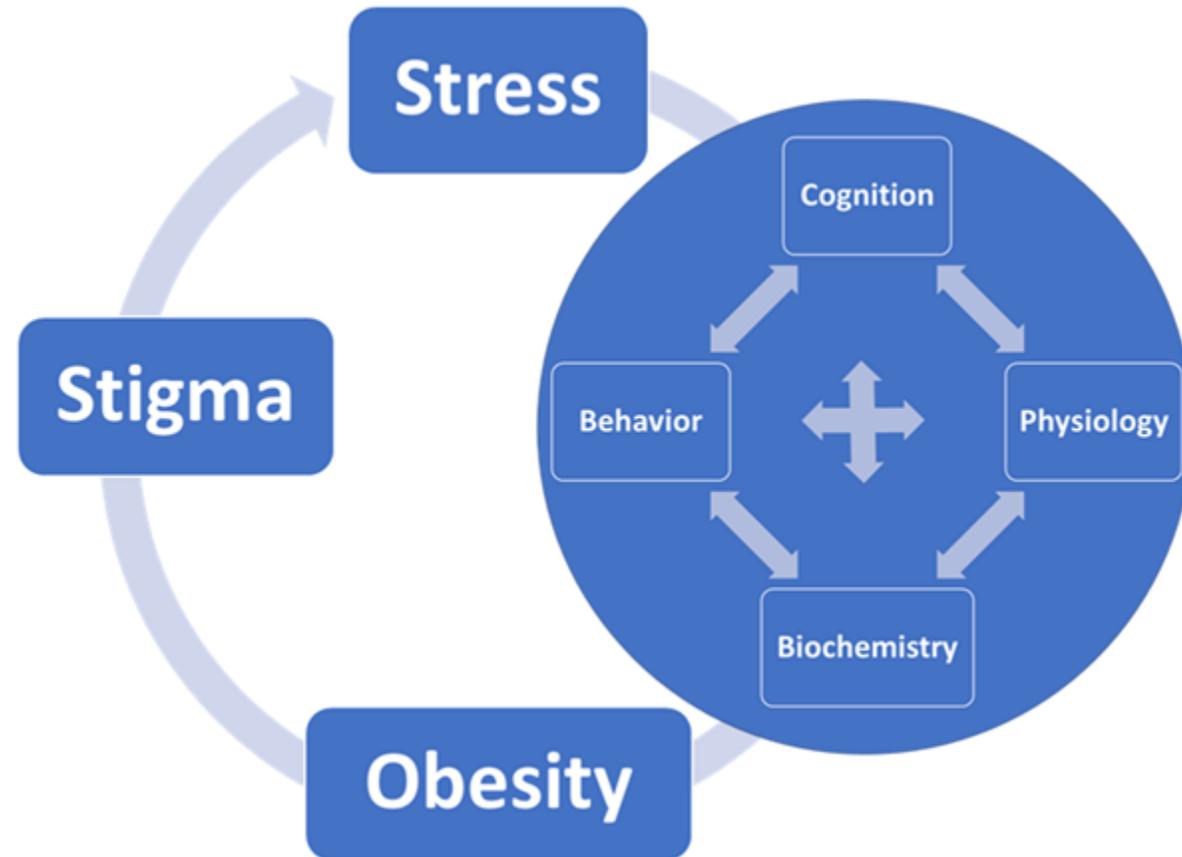
Explicit Bias Is Down, But Implicit Bias Is Growing

Dimension	Explicit Bias Trend 2007-2016	Implicit Bias Trend 2001-2016
Sexuality	Down	Down
Race	Down	Down
Skin Tone	Down	Down
Age	Down	Flat
Disability	Down	Flat
Weight	Down	Up

Source: Charlesworth and Banaji, 2018, Patterns of Implicit and Explicit Attitudes, Long-Term Change and Stability From 2007 to 2016

Living with Bias & Stigma Makes People Sicker

Pathways from stress to obesity



Demeaning and False Reporting About Obesity

- Dehumanizing images
 - Stereotypes
 - Headless body parts
 - Reflecting implicit bias
- Myths
- Presumptions
- Weight loss miracles



Photograph by Tony Otter / Flickr

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Photograph by Steven Depolo / Flickr

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 lehighvalleylive.com

Hold the fries: 1 in 3 Americans is **obese**, study says

About one in three Americans, or more than 100 million people, are obese, according to a report released this week. The report from Trust for ...
3 weeks ago



 VICE

Jessica Simpson's Weight Loss Secret: Simply Do Everything Differently

What's Jessica Simpson's secret to weight loss without going to the gym? Going to the gym, apparently. The erstwhile singer-turned-fashion ...
5 days ago



Obesity Is a Diagnosis Not a Behavior or an Identity

Obese people outnumber smokers two to one

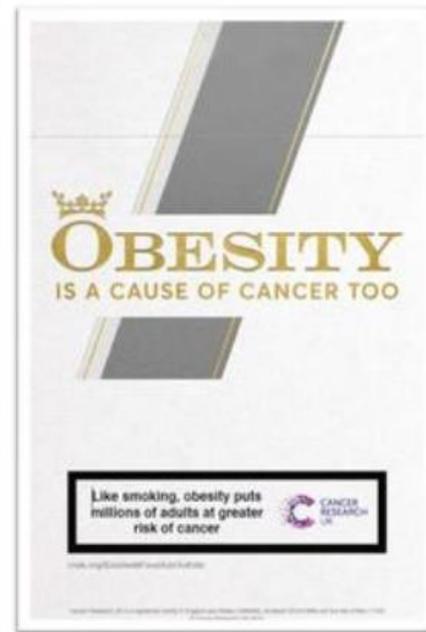
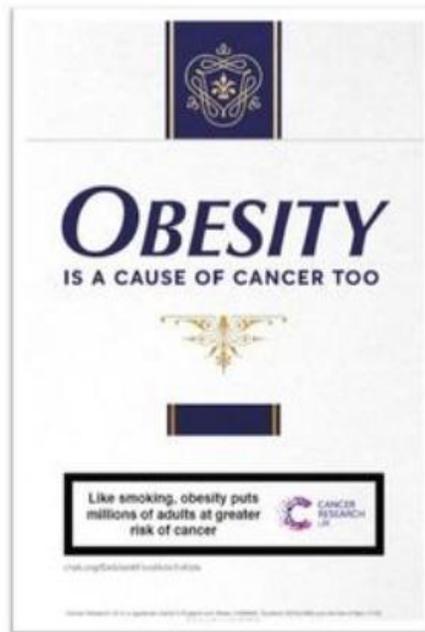
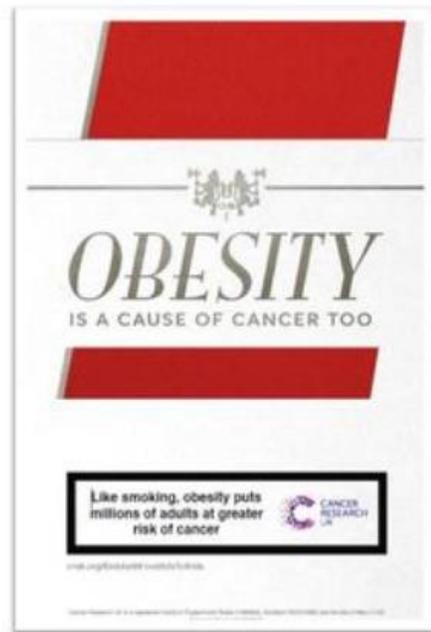
Category: **Press release**



3 July 2019



Cancer Research UK



Helpful and Informative Reporting About Obesity

- Humanizing imagery
- Objective and factual reporting
- Language free from implicit bias



Playground, photograph © Obesity Action Coalition / OAC Image Gallery

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We're barely using the best tool we have to fight obesity

Americans keep dieting to lose weight, but bariatric surgery is the most effective treatment out there.

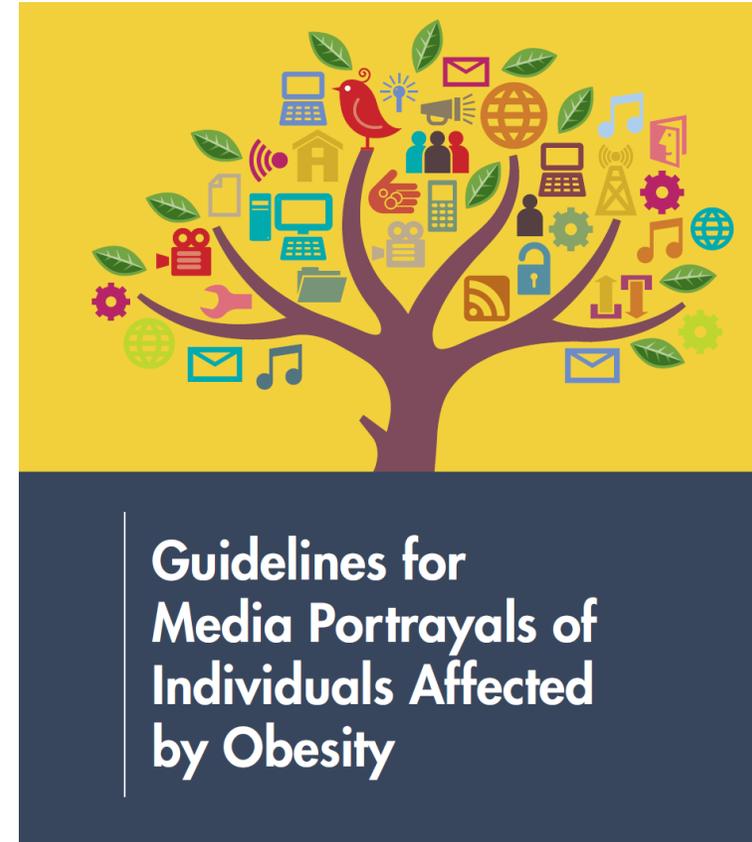
By Julia Belluz | @juliaoftoronto | julia.belluz@voxmedia.com | Updated May 16, 2019, 11:46am EDT

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Fire Fighter, from the OAC Image Gallery, photograph © Obesity Action Coalition

Resources

- Obesity Action Coalition
- The Rudd Center at UCONN
- Obesity Canada
- EASO
- World Obesity Federation
- The Obesity Society
- ASMBS
- Obesity Medicine Association



More Information



conscienhealth.org/news



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