

The Importance of Framing Issues in Shaping Policy

Berkeley Yorkery

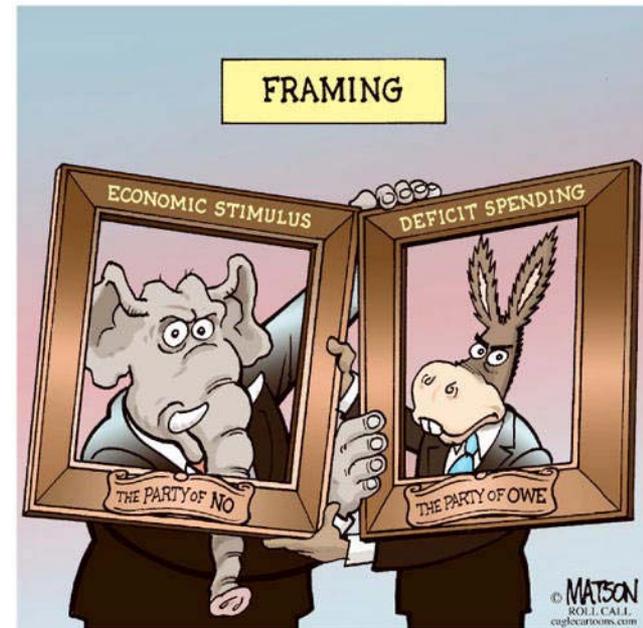
Project Director

North Carolina Institute of Medicine

- **Part 1: Intro to Framing**
 - What is framing?
 - How does framing work?
- **Part 2: Putting Framing into Action**
 - Why do we need framing?
 - Framing Basics
 - Framing young child mental health

What is framing?

- A frame is an organizing principle. It is the way a story is told that triggers the internal concepts and values that we use to interpret new information.
- Framing includes the whole message- context, messengers, images, metaphors, tone



What is framing?

- **“People use mental shortcuts to make sense of the world. These mental shortcuts rely on “frames” or a small set of internalized concepts and values that allow us to accord meaning to unfolding events and new information... The literature of social movements suggests that the prudent choice of frames, and the ability to effectively contest the opposition’s frames, lie at the heart of successful policy advocacy.”**

-FrameWorks Institute, Framing Public Issues Toolkit (2002), Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute Report

What is framing?

- **We use framing all the time in our daily lives to impact people's perceptions and decisions**
 - You really need to start exercising more and eating healthier to improve your health.
 - If you want to be around to see your grandkids grow up you should really start exercising more and eating healthier.
 - Your college reunion is coming up, don't you want to look great for it. Maybe you should start exercising more and eating healthier.

Framing public issues

- Frames are the internal concepts and values that we use to interpret new information
- Everyone has lots of frames in their head, some of them are competing
 - **Examples:**
 - American Dream
 - Individualism
 - Freedom
 - Justice
 - Fairness

People Make Decisions Based on Values

- “[Public health] has been under the illusion that if only people understood the facts, we’d be fine. Wrong. The facts alone will not set us free. People make decisions about politics and candidates based on their value system, and the language and frames that invoke those values.”

-Don Hazen, AlterNet.Org in the introduction to George Lakoff’s *Don’t think of an elephant*.

People Reject Objective Facts when They Don't Fit Internal Frames

55% of the public either believed that the ACA included “death panels” or didn't know when asked in December 2010.

Asked whether a government panel would make decisions about end-of-life care for people on Medicare



■ Answered Correctly ■ Answered Incorrectly ■ Did Not Know

Mixed Messages:

Advocates often speak passionately about their issues using language grounded in knowledge and data. Unfortunately such arguments do not always translate well to the public and policymakers because of preexisting concepts about who is responsible for a problem and who should solve it

Advocates say...

- Early childhood tooth decay is on the rise
- To prevent cavities, children need access to preventive services like sealants and fluoride protection
- Low-income children are more likely to develop dental disease

Public hears...

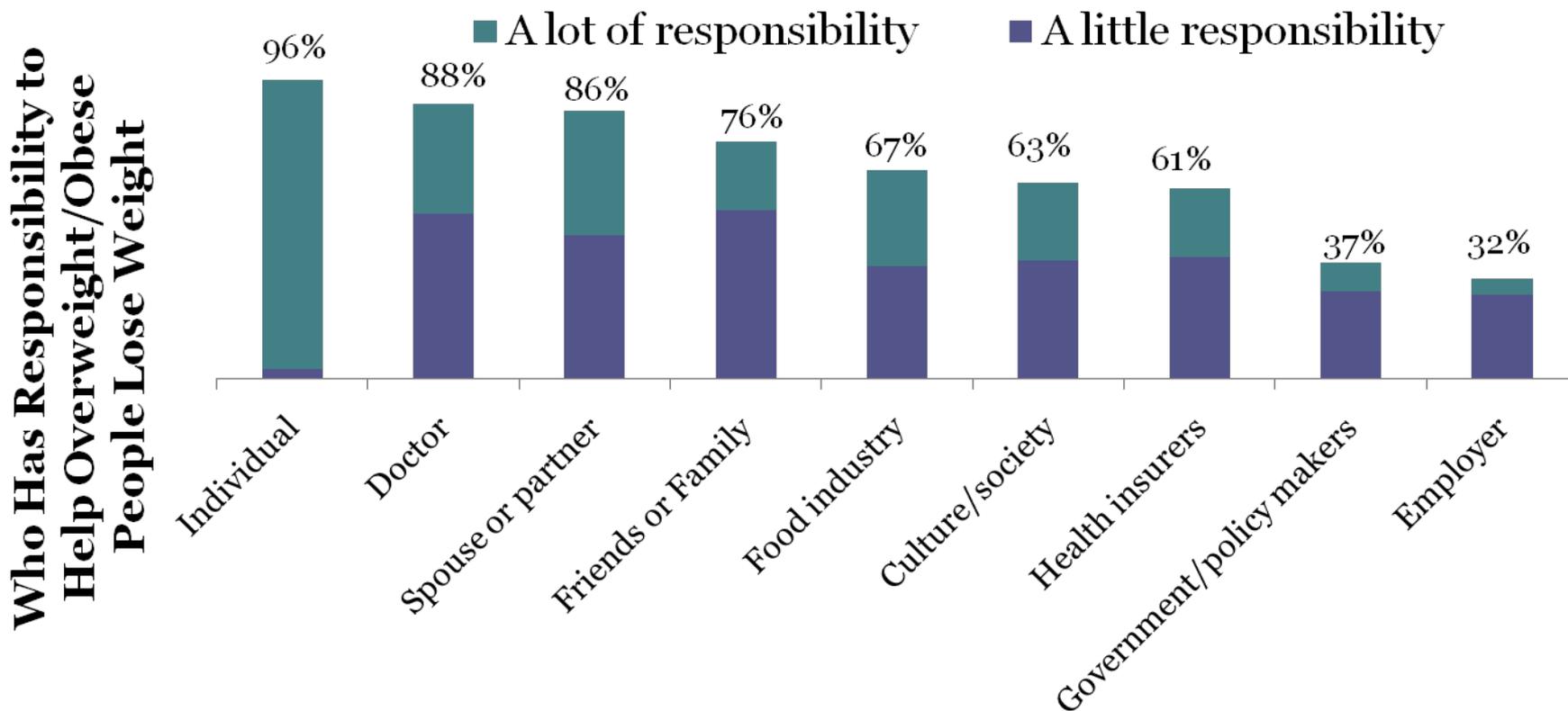
- Poor oral health is a symptom of bad parenting
- Kids need to do a better job brushing their teeth
- Poor kids have more important problems than their teeth

Framing Can Help Move People to Collective Action

- **“When it comes to specific issues, people are not ideologically consistent. In other words, their value systems are more dynamic and flexible than one might expect. That is why framing is so important. By putting together a set of frame elements—beginning with values—we can guide people away from more automatic thinking that renders policy solutions invisible and towards a way of thinking that elevates the need for collective action.”**

-FrameWorks Institute, Frequently Asked Questions about Framing. Issue No. 41, Revised Nov. 2008.

Obesity Still Largely Viewed as Individual Problem

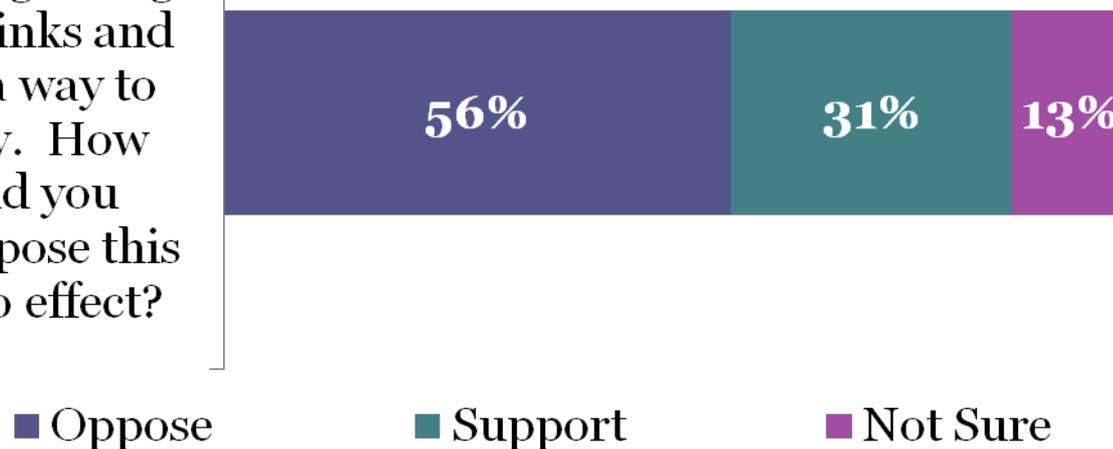


Harris Interactive. Weight and Obesity in America. June 19, 2007.

People Reject Policy Solutions to Reduce Obesity

As long as obesity viewed as an individual problem, it is less likely to garner support for broad-scale public policies.

There have been discussions regarding taxing soft drinks and fast food as a way to deter obesity. How much would you support or oppose this tax going into effect?



Harris Interactive Poll. Over Half of Americans Opposed to Taxing Soft Drinks and Fast Food. June 2010.

Dominant Frames

- **Every social issue has a variety of dominant frames that, if cued, can pull public opinion in different directions**
 - **If do not like the current dominant frame around a given issue, must work to “reframe” the issue in popular discourse**

Effects of Framing

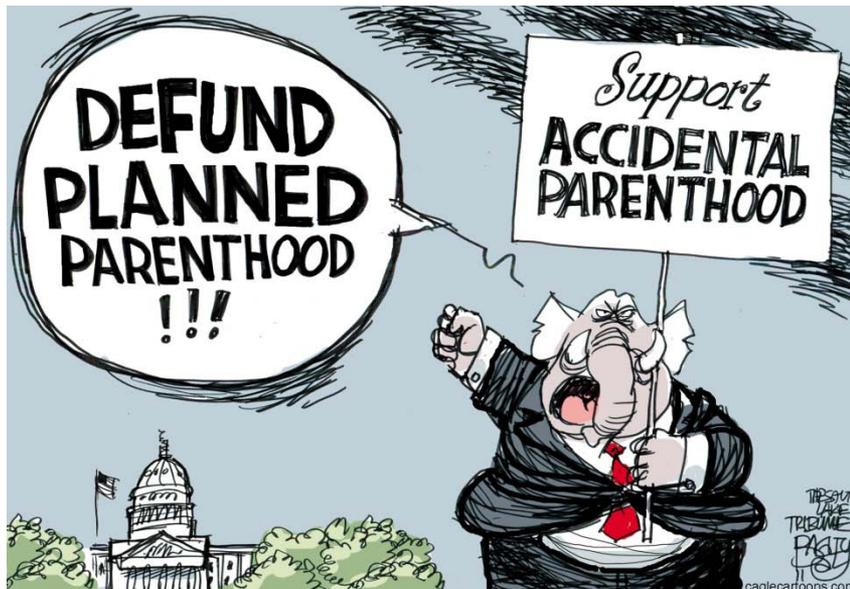
- Presenting the same concept in different formats can alter people's decisions

People on welfare	Poor people
Climate change	Global warming
Exploring for energy	Drilling for oil
Tax relief	Tax responsibility
Stimulus	Recovery
Fixing	Enhancing

VS

Why? Because different words trigger different internal frames

The Same Issue Can Be Perceived Very Differently, Depending on How it is Framed



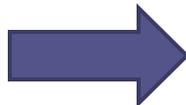
- “Behind every policy issue lurks a contest over conflicting, though equally plausible, concepts of the same abstract goal or value.”

-Deborah Stone, *Policy Paradox*

Episodic vs. Thematic Frames

Episodic

- Individuals
- Events
- Psychological
- Private
- Appeal to Consumers
- Better Information

 Fix the Person

Thematic

- Issues
- Trends
- Political/Environmental
- Public
- Appeal to Citizens
- Better Policies

 Fix the Condition

Episodic vs Thematic Frames

Example: Tobacco

- Early on, tobacco control communications efforts focused on individuals
 - Trying to convince individuals to quit
- Shift to focus on broader community and external forces
 - Move to banning advertising, developing treatments for tobacco addiction, smoke-free policies

How An Issue is Framed Leads to Certain Solutions

- If people see the issue as one of personal responsibility, they will devise solutions focused on the individual.
- If people see the issue as a broader societal problem—then they will develop societal responses, including regulation and higher taxes:
 - 88% support greater restriction on sale to minors (2008).
 - 84% support greater oversight of tobacco company health claims (2008).
 - Polls show support for increased tobacco taxes, generally by 2:1 margins. (State polling data, 2001-2010).

Tobacco Industry Viewed as Not Trustworthy—Preying on Innocent Victims

TRUE!

by Daryl Cagle



Source: LA Times quoting Richard Pollay; University of British Columbia study.

Underage smokers are three times as likely as adults to be swayed by cigarette advertising.



"It's funny to hear politicians accuse us of lying and distorting the truth."

- “New insights fail to get put into practice because they conflict with deeply held internal images of how the world works ... images that limit us to familiar ways of thinking and acting. That is why the discipline of managing mental models -- surfacing, testing, and improving our internal pictures of how the world works -- promises to be a major breakthrough for learning organizations.”

-Peter Senge