

A Randomized Experiment Examining the Role of Weight-Focused Message Framing on Parental Weight Talk Among Diverse Parents

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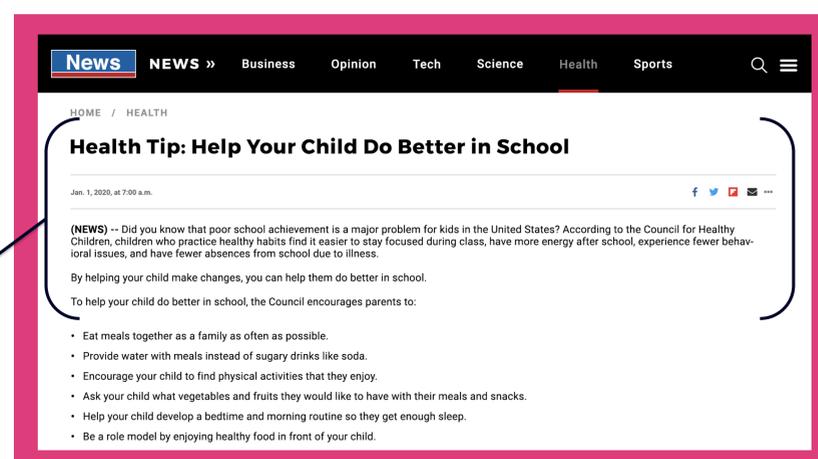
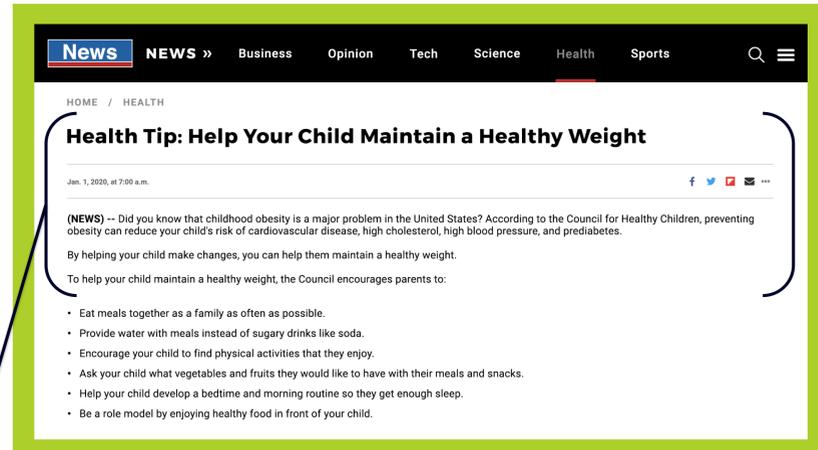
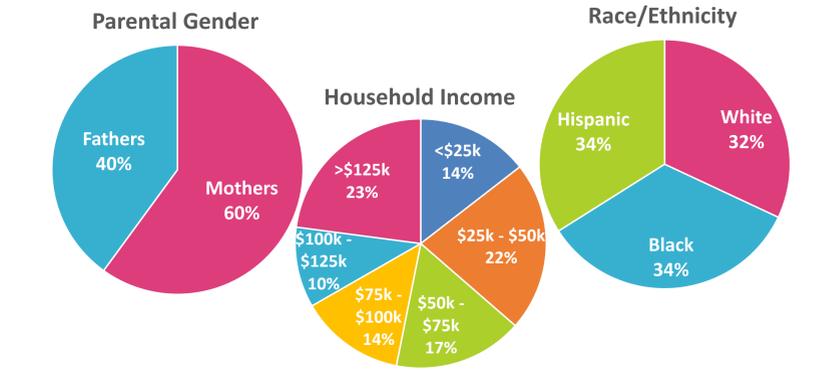
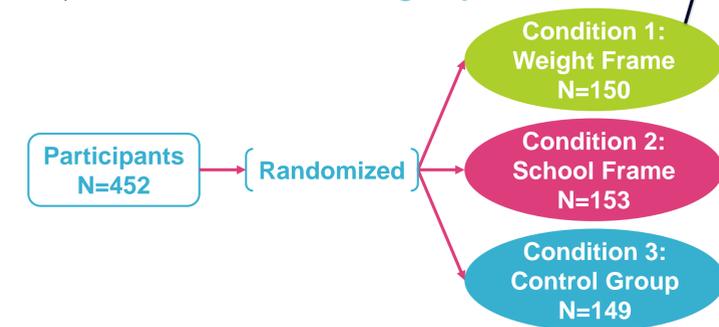
Background & Objective

- Health messages framed within the context of controlling body weight can negatively impact motivation to make health changes
- Parental weight talk (e.g., encouraging a child to lose weight) is associated with poor outcomes
- It is unknown how health messages featuring childhood obesity affects parental weight talk
- This study examined the effects of exposure to parent-targeted health advice that emphasizes either a weight-framed or non-weight framed message on parental intentions to engage in weight talk and health behaviors

Participants & Design

Randomized, controlled, online experiment in which 452 parents with a child between the ages of 6 and 17 were randomly assigned to one of three conditions:

- 1) Read a mock news article with health advice for parents emphasizing obesity (**weight-frame**)
- 2) Read identical health advice but framed within the context of improving children's school performance (**school-frame**)
- 3) No intervention **control group**



Measures & Analysis

- Survey questions assessed demographics, anthropometrics, weight bias internalization (WBI), and intention to engage in weight talk via 4 items ranging from 1=*extremely unlikely* to 7=*extremely likely*.
 - e.g., *In the next 12 months, how likely is it that you will have a conversation with your child about his/her weight or size?*
- Parental intentions to engage in the 6 health behaviors described in the messages were assessed with 6 items, also ranging from 1 to 7:
 - e.g., *In the next 12 months, how likely is it that you will eat meals together as a family as often as possible?*
- We used linear regression to assess the relationship between experimental condition and intention to engage in weight talk and the health behaviors, adjusting for parental BMI, child BMI%ile, parent and child gender, parent and child age, race/ethnicity, income, education, and experienced weight stigma
- We also examined whether parental WBI, race/ethnicity, gender, or income moderated the relationships

Results

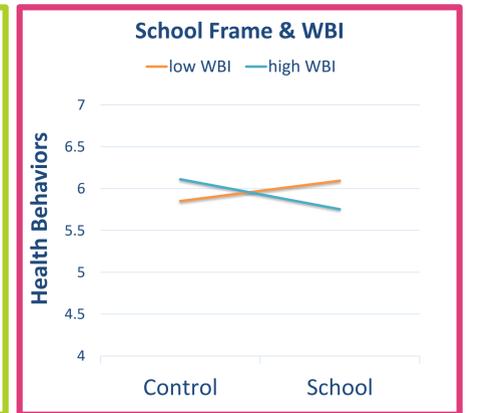
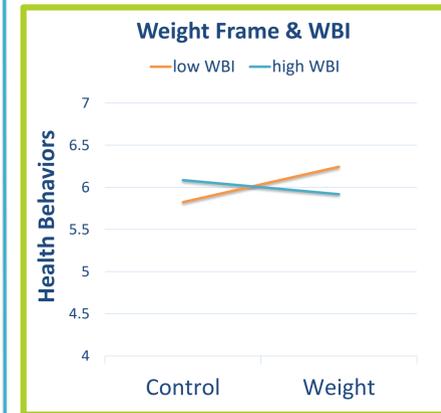
Main Effects

- Parents in the **weight-frame** condition were significantly more likely to report intention to engage in weight-focused conversations with their child than participants in the **control group** ($B=.60, \beta=.15, p=.003$), while there was no significant difference between the **school-frame** condition and the **control group**
- There were no significant group differences regarding intention to engage in the recommended health behaviors
- **Bottom line:** Messages that feature body weight may prompt parents to engage in weight talk, even when the message doesn't encourage talking to children about weight

Results (cont.)

Moderation

- Parents in either the weight or school-frame condition only had greater intentions to adopt the healthy behaviors, relative to the control group, when WBI was low, but had similar or somewhat less intention to engage in the recommended health behaviors when WBI was high
- Race/ethnicity, gender, or income did not moderate any of the tested relationships
- **Bottom Line:** Parents who have internalized negative beliefs about their own body weight may feel less inclined to adopt health behaviors when encouraged to do so, regardless if the encouragement references body weight or not



Conclusion

- Parent-targeted health advice that features childhood obesity prevention may inadvertently encourage parents to engage in weight talk with their children, which can have physical and psychological consequences
- Public health interventions should reconsider focusing on body weight in health campaigns targeting parents



Abstract & Contact Info