Attribution and Framing: Analysis of the First Lady’s Remarks on Childhood Obesity
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Background

- **Childhood Obesity Crisis**: In 2011-2012, 17.7% of 6 to 11-year-olds and 20.5% of 12 to 19-year-olds were obese (CDC, 2014).
- **Let’s Move**: program developed by First Lady Michelle Obama to reduce obesity rates within a generation (Let’s Move, N.D.).
- **Social Frames**: the ability to interpret and make judgments about social experiences unconsciously (Goffman, 1974).
  - Speakers may use frames to motivate their message in an attempt to guide the audience.
- **Public Health Frames**: consist of (1) risks and causes for obesity, (2) possible solutions to the obesity crisis, (3) links reducing childhood obesity to the overall well-being of children (Petersen & Linke, 2010).
- **Attribution**: assigning a behavior to a person or environment in an attempt to understand the cause of behavior (Miller, 1944).
  - Framing an issue as universal to the environment and not the individual is more likely to generate public support (Lawrence, 2004).
- **Obesity Stigma**: may contribute to disadvantages for adults and children who are obese (Park & Katz, 2011); the Institute of Medicine recommends testing messages for any unintended consequences (Gibb & Niederdeppe & Barry, 2013).

Research Questions

1: Are the remarks utilized public health framing?
2: Does the framing avoid focusing on thinness or a healthy lifestyle?
3: Of the 2,990 remarks (including speeches, conference calls, etc.) archived on the Whitehouse.gov website, 522 were made by First Lady Obama. 419 were eliminated because the content was unrelated to Let’s Move.
   - The final sample included 103 remarks found suitable for coding.
   - For audience type (e.g., Parents, Children, Schools), coded for audience type.
   - Risks/causes, solutions and links to societal well-being were coded as mentioned or not mentioned. Each cause/solution were coded as either individual or environmental category of attribution.
   - Interrater Reliability: 30% (n=31) coded by author and second trained coder.

Sample and Methods

**Results**

- **Environmental Risks**
  - Physical inactivity
  - Unhealthy food
  - Lack of health education
  - Poverty

- **Individual Risks**
  - Parental obesity
  - Parents who eat unhealthy foods
  - Lack of activity

- **Environmental and Individual Solutions**
  - Exercise changes-Exercise
  - Exercise changes-Schools
  - Exercise changes-Families
  - Diet changes-Families
  - Public policy changes-Exercise
  - Diet changes-Schools

- **Risk-Cause Mentioned**
  - No Mention
  - One Component
  - Two Components
  - All Components

- **Stigmatizing Remarks**
  - Healthy Lifestyle
  - Lifestyle and Weight
  - No Mention

- **Public Health Framing**
  - No Mention
  - One Component
  - Two Components
  - All Components

Discussion

- Public health framing techniques are used in less than half of the remarks. This may hamper the public’s support for policy changes.
- Environmental responsibility and risk is mentioned more than individual responsibility and risk.
- While the focus of the remarks is on a healthy lifestyle, focusing on poverty and busy parents is concerning as a source of stigma.
- Future work may include additional analysis of audience influence on attributions of responsibility and analysis of media reaction to remarks.

References and Acknowledgements

References available upon request: jenn.audrey@gmail.com
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