

THE BLAME FRAME: DOES SHIFTING RESPONSIBILITY FROM THE
INDIVIDUAL TO SOCIETY IN NEWS STORIES ABOUT DIABETES INFLUENCE
WHERE READERS PLACE RESPONSIBILITY?

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ABSTRACT

Storytellers will always have a powerful influence on their audiences. As nonfiction storytellers, journalists are no exception. What we write, how we write about it, and whom we write about all inform the way our readers experience the world. I first noticed this influence when I reported on the alarming rate of diabetes in Columbia's African-American community. I followed Tracy Edwards, whose legs had been amputated because of complications from diabetes. The frame I used to tell the story was a loss frame that used voices from within the African-American community. After the story published, I wondered: Does telling the story of diabetes with different frames influence how readers think about responsibility and blame? Did the readers of my story blame Tracy for his illness or hold him responsible for overcoming it? How likely were readers to support government interventions after reading stories like this one? This research study sought to answer those questions. The findings of this 2x2 between-subjects experiment showed main effects for the framing manipulation across all five dependent variables and main effects for three of the dependent variables in the disparity frame. I've learned that journalists should be aware of the way they construct, source, and frame stories because these decisions have public health and public policy ramifications.