



Talking About Disparities Toolkit

You Say/They Think – Handling Competing Frames

In this tool we present a series of “frame clashes” - or the unintended consequences of common strategies used when talking about disparities. Based on findings from FrameWorks’ research on framing race and disparities, this tool shows communicators what is in the swamp of public understanding, and how particular frame choices can trigger unproductive thoughts and associations. (**Note that the tool titled Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) gives explicit examples of how to navigate this swamp effectively with the research-based framing recommendations.*)

The examples in this tool are meant to help advocates deconstruct the frame effects of certain common strategies used when talking about disparities. The examples draw from common disparities frames found in both advocates’ materials and the news media. In the course of our research, we found these common frames to trigger dominant and often unproductive models of thinking – what we often refer to as the *swamp* of public understanding. The Message Brief in this toolkit explains dominant patterns and the implications of those patterns for support for policies that seek to address disparities. What we show here in this tool, is how easily cued those patterns are by typical ways of talking about disparities.

Each example follows a four-part structure which is, essentially: What you (the experts) say; What you hope the public will think; What the public is likely to think; and, Why. The examples focus on the issues of Health, Education and Early Childhood Development. For those advocates and experts working within those specific issue areas, it is important to note that FrameWorks Institute has extensive communications research in each of these issue areas, which can be found on our website, at: <http://www.frameworksinstitute.org/allissues.html>

Health Disparities¹

| You (the experts) say... | The hope is that they (the public) will think about.. | But instead they think... | Why? Because a dominant model is triggered. <i>That cultural model is....</i> |
|--|--|---|--|
| In America, the prevalence of obesity is far higher in black and Hispanic children than it is in white children | Structural causes of health disparities | <i>That's because some parents don't seem to care about their children's health. They just let them do whatever they want, as far as eating habits. Some people just aren't disciplined with themselves or their families</i> | "The Family Bubble" or Parental Responsibility for Children's Behavior and Development |
| We need to pay attention to disparities in outcomes between groups because it's really a warning sign that the system needs fixing for everyone | Structural causes of health disparities; Interdependence | <i>It's up to the individual, you know. It's not society's or government's job to make sure you eat well or you try to take care of yourself</i> | Self-Making Person; Health Individualism |
| It is simply the case in this country that certain groups are discriminated against when it comes to health care access | Structural, historical and institutional racism | <i>It's not legal to discriminate against certain groups. We have laws against that.</i> | Historical Progress |
| We have to ensure that income doesn't affect health status. Right now in our country, people who have better-paying jobs or higher-status jobs tend to be healthier. | Structural causes of health disparities | <i>If you have a higher status job than you are probably more educated, and if you're more educated you probably pay more attention to things like health</i> | Health Individualism |

¹ For a succinct review of FrameWorks' research on Community Health, see: http://www.frameworksinstitute.org/assets/files/PDF_communityhealth/framingmanualfoodfit.pdf

Education Disparities

| You (the experts) say... | The hope is that they (the public) will think about.. | But instead they think... | Why? Because a dominant model is triggered. <i>That cultural model is....</i> |
|---|---|---|---|
| Only about 50 percent of Native American, Hispanic and African American students are passing high school on time now, and this affects our future prosperity | Structural causes of educational disparities; inequality of opportunity | <i>At some point they're going to realize they can't do much without an education. The more they put it off, the farther behind they are.</i> | Self-Making Person |
| There are large disparities among school districts in this country in standards for teacher training and professional development. Higher standards for teachers means higher achievement for our kids. | Reducing inequity in professional standards; the influence of teacher preparation on student outcomes | <i>Isn't it really about having teachers who care? Maybe these schools have to make sure teachers have more one-on-one time with students</i> | Caring Teacher = School Quality |
| The federal government has simply failed to remedy racial disparities in education despite its obligation to do otherwise | Government's role in redressing educational disparities | <i>It's not the government's job to make sure kids stay in school and work hard and achieve - it's parents.</i> | "Nanny" Government/The Family Bubble |
| Closing the Achievement Gap is this generations' civil rights issue | Inequality of opportunity; the collective benefits of equality in education | <i>The achievement gap is about some kids working hard and others not. Everyone's had equal opportunity to learn in this country.</i> | Self-Making Person |

Early Childhood Disparities²

| You (the experts) say... | The hope is that they (the public) will think about.. | But instead they think... | Why? Because a dominant model is triggered. That cultural model is.... |
|--|--|--|--|
| Programs like Head Start and others for disadvantaged kids teach young children important skills | The importance of early experiences on social/emotional/intellectual development | <i>It might give kids the chance to learn how to get along with other kids - but isn't this really just babysitting? it's not really "education"</i> | Development = Educational Achievement |
| Preschool can give our kids the right start they need for future success | Equal opportunity; the importance of early experiences to later development | <i>Some parents today are really pushing their kids too fast too early. Those parents who show kids flash-cards when they're still in their cribs. We need to slow down and just let kids be kids.</i> | The Hurried Child |
| We have made a commitment to early education in our state, but some groups are simply being denied access to quality programs. | Equal opportunity; structurally driven disparities | <i>Isn't it really about some people not taking advantage of what's in front of them? This country is overflowing with programs, programs, programs - it's about taking advantage</i> | Self-Makingness/Family Bubble |
| Unfortunately, the children who are most likely to benefit from day care are the least likely to receive it | Equal opportunity; structurally driven disparities | <i>Shouldn't we pay more attention to teaching parents how to parent early on? Aren't parent education programs really the fix here?</i> | Family Bubble |

² For a succinct review of FrameWorks' research on Early Childhood Development, see: http://www.frameworksinstitute.org/assets/files/ECD/e cd_message_brief_2009.pdf