

Integrating Social and Behavioral Theory into Public Health

LAB 1: Introduction to the personal health behavior change

Task 1: Preparation

Before you come to lab, think about and choose a health-related behavior change to undertake. An appropriate behavior change will:

- Require maintenance (i.e. not be a one-time behavior)
- Be broadly health related
- Would make you feel pleased if you could accomplish it
- Not be a problem if more than one person in the group elects to do the same thing.

For the purposes of this exercise, please pick something that is meaningful to you and non-trivial but something that you feel comfortable talking about with your classmates and the course team. There is no need to pick anything especially difficult, intimate, or momentous; on the contrary, we encourage you to make it something fun or new to you. You might want to pick a back-up goal in case your colleagues give you feedback that makes you reconsider your first choice.

When thinking about your topic, consider the characteristics recommended by behavioral psychology and cognitive therapy that facilitate change:

- The change should be quantifiable, i.e., something that can be counted, either absolutely (how many times you did it) or as a rate (out of X similar situations, you did it Y times). You can be creative about ways to count things.
- The change should be observable to you and/or others. This can be tricky because some changes (“I will feel more relaxed”) may not have obviously visible consequences. In that case, what visible behavior might accompany the change?
- The change should be framed as a positive action on your part rather than as something you will cease doing. For example: “When the urge to smoke occurs, I will successfully distract myself until I am absorbed in another activity and the urge goes away” rather than, “I’ll stop smoking.”
- The change should be modest and *something you feel fairly confident you can accomplish in a few weeks*. If it is tied to a larger goal, make it a small, do-able step.

Task 2: In the lab session:

1. Take turns describing your planned change and getting feedback from the group about how it fits with the “characteristics of successful change” described above. Make adjustments as needed.
2. Once you have heard everyone’s ideas, start thinking what you can do as a group to facilitate each other’s changes. Don’t commit to any particular plan just yet, but jot down two or three ideas with some notes about why these ideas appeal and the mechanisms by which they might act. When thinking about these “mechanisms” think

about broad categories of ecologic models: what impact on your overall environment (built or rule-based), social interactions, or personal feeling or decision-making might the group's plans have in facilitating your behavior change?

Each group should submit a short document that:

- Lists the chosen behavior change tasks for each member of the group
- Lists the two or three group activities contemplated and the possible mechanism by which they would help.

Only one group member needs to submit this document, but please be sure that all group member names are listed.

Task 3: Individual lab journal entry to upload

Address the following in about 1 page:

1. Briefly describe the change that you want to undertake and what motivates you to undertake it.
1. Describe the way in which you will be able to assess the outcome (as described in the "characteristics of successful changes")
2. Rank hypothesized influences of various levels of the Berkman/Glass model – for this particular change, which do you think will be most salient and why? Don't worry about any particular formulation of the "levels" of the model – just pick ones that suggest a range of societal/macro, inter and intrapersonal ones.