

## **Integrating Social and Behavioral Theory into Public Health**

### **LAB 2: Culture and explanatory models**

The overall purpose of this lab is to think about how culture shapes and constrains behavior through influencing what is permitted and not permitted, what human states and actions are valued, and what meaning is given to having a particular condition or taking a particular course of action.

#### **Task 1: Preparation (Think about this before you come to lab)**

Prior to coming to the lab session, think about the behavior change you are undertaking:

1. Try to articulate for yourself the cultural context in which the change is taking place. This context might be influenced by your ethnicity, nationality, religion, or native language, among other things. What do we mean by cultural context? Do the cultures of which you feel membership in promote individual versus collective action or (more likely) combinations of these depending on the circumstances? Do these cultures promote a certain range of individual difference or do they value conformity? What is the value placed on self-betterment and what are the accepted mechanisms for achieving it? Feel free to think about culture at many levels, including the culture of your family of origin, the culture of communities in which you have lived, etc.
2. To what extent is the fact that you are undertaking this particular change a “behavioral identity badge?” This might relate to the change itself, or its goal. (As an example, when you appear in the setting or with the equipment/clothing related to your behavior change, what does that say about your membership in a particular cultural group?) Or, does the identification of this behavior with a particular socio-economic group get in the way or help your adoption of it?
3. How does the extent to which the behavior is closely related to a particular cultural identity seem to be facilitating or hindering your motivation to make the change? (As an example, think about a North American adopting yoga in the days before Eastern culture had been incorporated into North American culture to the extent it is today.)
4. What does this behavior change symbolize in your culture (distinct from what it might look like – the “badge” question)? That is, what larger statement is it making (to you or others) about you, about what your culture values, or about what it means to live a good life? Who or what forces have identified this behavior as related to health (that is, to what extent is the behavior part of the social construction of some condition)? How much attention does it get and how does that attention manifest itself? Does the behavior relate in any overt or unspoken way to a particular moral position?
5. In another culture, would any of the beliefs or values that underlie your behavior change be questioned or difficult to understand?

#### **Task 2: In the lab session**

Pair up and administer to each other this modified “Kleinman interview.” Kleinman has said that he never intended these questions to really be used as an interview protocol, and several versions have been published. This version is loosely adapted from the class reading to try to get insight on the behavior changes you are undertaking.

This exercise is meant to elicit your “explanatory model” for the problem your behavior is designed to address. For example, if you are trying to find time to relax for 10 minutes a day, the underlying issue

or “problem” might be stress. What are your beliefs about how the stress is caused, what having it (stress) says about you in your culture, and what are acceptable ways of addressing it. How has the explanatory model influenced your choice of methods for addressing the underlying problem.

It may be that by the time the discussion is over, you will find that the “condition” that caused you to adopt your behavior change is not exactly what you had thought.

Kleinman Interview (modified):

Consider the change you want to make as addressing some problem that you presently experience or would like to avoid.

1. How would you describe the “problem” or health issue that your behavior change will address?
2. What do you think causes this “problem”?
3. Why do you think it started when it did (or what makes it start for any given person)?
4. What does having this problem do to you? What is the mechanism by which it impacts your health?
5. How does this problem impact your role in your family or community? What does it say about you?
6. How severe is the problem relative to other things that concern you or could happen to you?
7. What do you fear most about your problem?
8. What kind of treatments or interventions are possible for this problem, and which would you prefer to receive/take part in?
9. With regards to the problem, what are the most important results you hope to get from your behavior change?

Reflect to each other on the process. Did you gain any insights? Were you surprised by your own or your partner’s answer? If both partners were working on the same “problem” or health issue, did your models differ? Most importantly, how has answering these questions changed your motivation to undertake your planned behavior change?

**To sum up**

As an entire group, revisit the ideas you discussed in the first lab session for how to facilitate your individual behavior changes as a group. Discuss the 2 or 3 activities or strategies you proposed in lab 1, and come to a consensus on what strategies you will now take on as a group to encourage or influence your individual behavior changes, so you can finalize your plans.

**Task 3: Individual lab journal entry to submit**

Answer the following questions in about 2 pages

1. How would you describe the cultural context in which your behavior change is taking place? Is your change culturally congruent or not?
  
2. Comment briefly on whether there are aspects of your explanatory model for the underlying problem that support your behavior change. For example, is it the implications for your social role that drives the change? The fact that there are no treatments once the problem reaches a certain level of severity?