



WHY LEARN THEORY?

- In order to have an *impact* on health behavior, it is necessary to *understand* it.
- It is increasingly important to demonstrate **systematic connections** between:
 - an assessment of a health problem
 - what you say you are going to do about it
 - how you know whether or not your program had an impact
- Because **theory is a tool for explaining behavior**, it is a key part of making such connections.

ROOTS OF CURRENT HEALTH BEHAVIOR THEORY

- Theories are explanatory statements or models.
- The term *theory* as it is commonly used derives its meaning from a context of *Western* philosophy and science.
- *There are many other explanatory traditions as well.*

ROOTS OF CURRENT HEALTH BEHAVIOR THEORY

- Psychology and social psychology are the primary fields from which most current health behavior theories come.
- And...important contributions from ecology, sociology, anthropology, organizational and community theory, communications theory, and others.

BASIC ASSUMPTIONS IN THE WESTERN TRADITION OF THEORY

- **Order and regularity** – that the universe is ordered and regular, which has practical applications for technology, etc.
- **Predictability** – if there is order and regularity, the rules or “laws” can be learned, and used to *predict*.

BASIC ASSUMPTIONS IN THE WESTERN TRADITION OF THEORY

- **Primacy of empirical data** – the *positivist epistemology* associated with the Western tradition holds that what we know comes from our senses -- observable, tangible evidence
- **Progress and perfectability** – that there is an unstoppable movement towards more knowledge, better understanding, higher complexity etc.

BEHAVIORIST PSYCHOLOGY

- ASSUMPTION: Behavior is learned through a process of *stimulus and response*. "Thinking" not a major part of this process.
- Early focus on *classical conditioning* (Pavlov's dog), then on *operant conditioning* (Skinner) -- the conditioning of behavior by positive and negative reinforcements. Idea of *shaping* behavior, *behavior modification*.

BEHAVIORIST PSYCHOLOGY

- Behavior modification is still used in smoking cessation, addiction treatment, and other programs.
- The basic assumptions about learning behavior through positive and negative reinforcements appear in a number of health behavior theories.

COGNITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

- Focus on the THINKING PROCESS, in contrast to behaviorist psychology.
- THINKING PROCESSES include perception, memory, decision-making, interpretation, reasoning, judgment, etc.
- Some cognitive psychologists (e.g. Piaget) focus on the *development* of the thinking process.
- See the influence of cognitive psychology in many of the *individual-level* theories that are discussed in the course.

HUMANISTIC PSYCHOLOGY

- Focus on individual capacity, on human capability of choice.
- ASSUMPTION: That human beings desire to grow and attain their full potential – role of psychology is to help.
- Before attaining higher level needs, humans have to satisfy basic to "mid-level" needs, from basic physiological to emotional to social (Maslow).
- Humanistic psychology influenced the public health emphasis on quality of life, and the lifestyle concept.

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

- Most of psychology focuses on the individual experience; social psychology focuses on the interaction between individuals and the group – groups, relationships, social units.
- This may include: group dynamics, authority and legitimacy, emotion and its expression, aggression, self, identity, motivation, gender roles, norms, attitudes, and group prejudices.
- Social psychology has had a considerable influence on such health behavior theories as Social Cognitive Theory, Theory of Planned Behavior, Social Network Theory, and others.

SOCIOLOGY

- Sociology includes the study of society and its phenomena – social groups, social hierarchies, social structures, the nature of social interaction and organization, and the interaction between social and economic systems.
- There is overlap between sociology, psychology, and anthropology in explaining behavior.
- Influence on health behavior theory: concepts of class and hierarchy, group norms and conformity, role of social capital, social organization and its impact on behavior.

CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

- Focus on the role of *culture* in human behavior, the ways in which life-patterns are organized, together with systems of knowledge and belief, language and symbol.
- This may include: cultural beliefs, attitudes, social-cultural roles, gender, language, symbolic expression, social authority and legitimacy, health knowledge systems, healing practices, healers, etc.

CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY

- Influence on health behavior theory:
 - holistic (ecological) approaches,
 - cultural influence on treatment and care,
 - values and meanings as connected to behavior, and
 - cultural constructions of disease and illness.

ECOLOGY AND BIOLOGICAL SYSTEMS

- The study of how living organisms function within *interdependent systems* – human ecology refers to the same idea applied to human systems.
- This may include: relationships between the life patterns of organisms and their environment, ecological niches, and symbiotic and other relationships.
- Influence on health behavior theory: ecological approach, focus on multiple *determinants of health*, and the role of the environment in behavior.