

A Model for the Study of Culture and Health Behavior

Patricia Flynn & Hector Betancourt

Department of Psychology

Loma Linda University

Loma Linda, California 92350

pflynn@llu.edu

hbetancourt@llu.edu

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Understanding Health Disparities

- Current Approaches for Understanding Health Disparities
 - Focus on social and structural factors
 - Unequal access to health care, institutional barriers, factors associated with population categories such as race, ethnicity, and SES
 - Compare various ethnic/racial or SES groups based on a particular health behavior or outcome
 - Useful for understanding the groups of individuals that are at risk for discrimination or poorer health care and outcomes
 - However, more efforts should be made to explain why these disparities exist
- This presentation addresses some aspects of *culture* that may account for some of the disparities in health behavior and outcome among diverse individuals

A Cultural Approach to Health Disparities

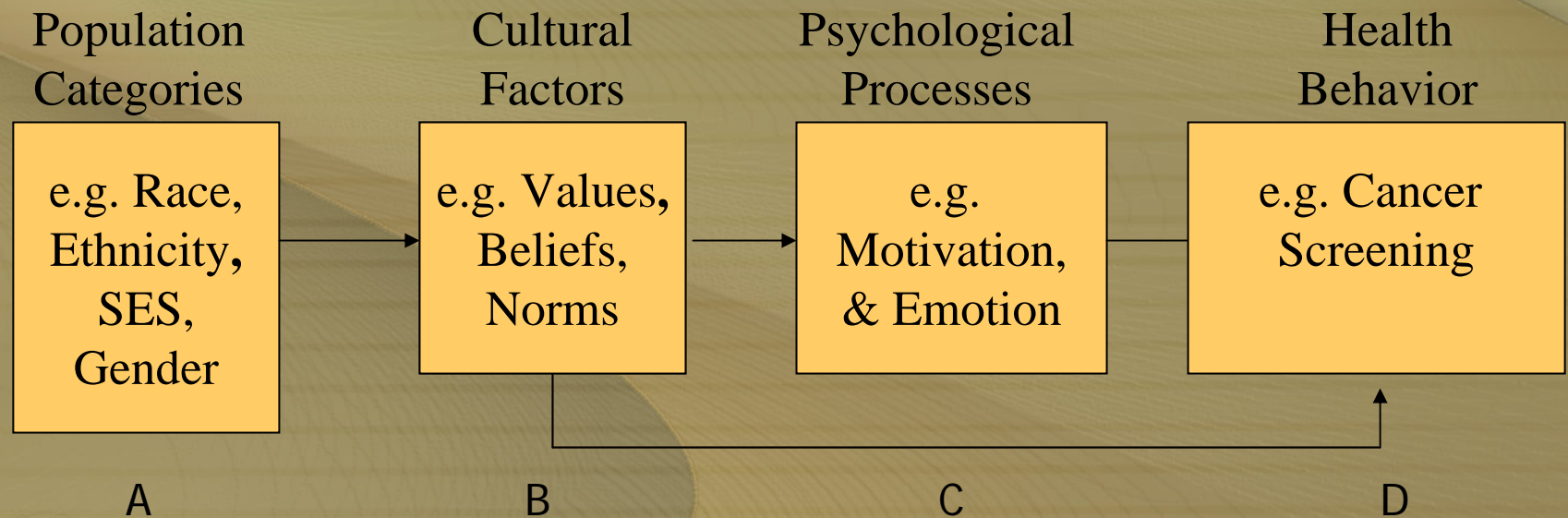
- Although the US is becoming more diverse, health policies and interventions are based on Anglo American cultural assumptions
 - Little attention paid to aspects of culture from the perspective of individuals from diverse racial/ethnic/SES groups
- Need to recognize that cultural factors and related health behaviors may in part help to explain disparities between ethnic/racial and SES groups
- A better understanding of cultural factors would be beneficial in at least two ways:
 - Health care personnel can better understand their own cultural assumptions and how these may influence their interactions with culturally diverse individuals
 - Knowledge of the cultural factors that may influence health behavior would allow for more effective and culturally appropriate interventions

Limitations of Research on Culture in the Health Sciences

- Lack of Clarity in Definitions of Terms Associated with Culture
 - Race: physical characteristics such as skin color, facial features, hair type
 - Ethnicity: common history or background such as nationality, culture, language
- Culture: should be defined in terms that are relevant to health phenomena
 - Values, beliefs, social norms and expectations relevant to health behavior and outcome
- Comparative Analysis of Groups
 - In addition to identifying disparities between individuals from different groups, research must deal with *what causes* those disparities
 - Research on the role of culture in health behavior may contribute to the understanding of such causes
 - Specific aspects of culture and related psychological (e.g. motivational) processes may explain some of the disparities among culturally diverse populations.
- Failure to Recognize Intra-Group Diversity
 - Some ethnic and racial groups are comprised of individuals from many diverse backgrounds in terms of national origin, SES, culture, and religion
- Lack of Culturally Appropriate Instruments
 - Many measures lack a theoretical foundation or are translated from measures originally developed for the mainstream population

Remedies: A Theoretical Model for The Study of Culture and Health Disparities

Distal.....To more proximal determinants of behavior



Population/social categories (A) represent sources of cultural variation but are more distal (less influential) to psychological functioning (C) and health behavior (D).

Remedies: A Methodological Approach

The Bottom-Up Approach

- Begin with an observation from the study of culture and investigate its implications for theories and observations of behavior
 - Identify cultural elements relevant to behavior of individuals from a particular group and develop measures of these cultural elements
- Use those psychometrically appropriate instruments to measure cultural factors relevant to a particular behavior
 - Test within as well as between group variations on that cultural factor and how those variations may relate to differences in the corresponding behavior

Application of the Model and Approach

The Study of Culture and Cancer Screening

- According to the Model for the Study of Culture
 - Culture is defined in terms of values, beliefs, expectations, and norms
 - These aspects of culture are expected to influence screening both directly and indirectly through mediating psychological processes such as cognitions and emotions relevant to screening
- According to the Methodological Approach
 - Triandis' Study of Subjective Culture
 - Interview schedule was designed to identify aspects of culture such as values, beliefs, expectations, and norms relevant to breast and cervical cancer screening
 - 80 qualitative interviews were conducted with the minority population (Latino) and the mainstream (Anglo) population by bilingual interviewers
 - Content coded for emerging cultural elements by a group of native expert judges
 - Identify culture-specific and culture-general factors