"SOCIAL CLASS DISPARITIES IN HEALTH AND EDUCATION: REDUCING INEQUALITY BY APPLYING A SOCIOCULTURAL SELF MODEL OF BEHAVIOR"


Abstract:
The literature on social class disparities in health and education contains 2 underlying, yet often opposed, models of behavior: the individual model and the structural model. These models refer to largely unacknowledged assumptions about the sources of human behavior that are foundational to research and interventions. Our review and theoretical integration proposes that, in contrast to how the 2 models are typically represented, they are not opposed, but instead they are complementary sets of understandings that inform and extend each other. Further, we elaborate the theoretical rationale and predictions for a third model: the sociocultural self model of behavior. This model incorporates and extends key tenets of the individual and structural models. First, the sociocultural self model conceptualizes individual characteristics (e.g., skills) and structural conditions (e.g., access to resources) as interdependent forces that mutually constitute each other and that are best understood together. Second, the sociocultural self model recognizes that both individual characteristics and structural conditions indirectly influence behavior through the selves that emerge in the situation. These selves are malleable psychological states that are a product of the ongoing mutual constitution of individuals and structures and serve to guide people's behavior by systematically shaping how people construe situations. The theoretical foundation of the sociocultural self model lays the groundwork for a more complete understanding of behavior and provides new tools for developing interventions that will reduce social class disparities in health and education. The model predicts that intervention efforts will be more effective at producing sustained behavior change when (a) current selves are congruent, rather than incongruent, with the desired behavior and (b) individual characteristics and structural conditions provide ongoing support for the selves that are necessary to support the desired behavior.

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Status of Research: Completed/published
Research Type: Publications, Essays, Articles, and Book Chapters
Related Fields: Education, Health, Psychology, Social Psychology

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