Culture-Sensitive Health Communication

Scientific small group meeting of experts
Erfurt, Germany | May 22nd – 24th, 2014

The conference takes place at the international guest house of the University of Erfurt (IBZ). The historic building which was laboriously reconstructed by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation is located in the historic city centre.

Internationales Begegnungszentrum der Universität Erfurt (IBZ)
Michaelisstraße 38
99084 Erfurt
Germany
Welcome

Preventing vector-borne diseases in Africa, SARS in Asia, Measles in Europe: Designing effective health communication is challenging. International health organizations such as WHO or ECDC face this challenge in their everyday work. Even within one region, such as the WHO European region, cultures differ significantly, considering the spread of the region from Iceland to Portugal to the Russian Federation. As much as health messages’ contents vary from region to region, cultural differences influence the way in which individuals perceive, understand and react upon information and persuasive messages.

Scholars from various academic fields have studied the influence of culture on the brain, on perception, on cooperation, on communication. In this meeting we will take the chance to bring together members of international health organizations with influential scientists from psychology, communication science, and behavioral economics from almost all regions of the world. The meeting aims at stimulating exchange and promoting cooperation, as well as empirical and theoretical development. Moreover, we will discuss best practices for a culture-sensitive health communication. To this end, the small group meeting is conceptualized as an intense workshop, where invited speakers meet and discuss their work – with peer researchers and experts from the field.

The results of the meeting will be published in a Special Issue in the SAGE journal Medical Decision Making. The special issue will be entitled “Improving medical decision making through culture-sensitive health communication”. Deadline for the submissions is July 31st 2014.

A large number of sponsors made this meeting possible. We gratefully acknowledge generous support by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and the World Health Organization, Regional office for Europe (WHO/Europe), support by the German Research Foundation (DFG), the University of Erfurt and RWTH Aachen University.

We are happy to welcome you in Erfurt and we wish you and us an inspiring meeting with fruitful discussions, insights, and exchange.

Sincerely,

Cornelia Betsch & Robert Böhm
### Scientific Program

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Abstracts & Speakers

Culture, Self, and the Brain: Implications for Health and Health Communications

Shinobu Kitayama
University of Michigan, USA

Cultural neuroscience is an emerging field that examines the interdependencies among culture, mind, and the brain. By investigating brain plasticity in varying social and ecological contexts, it seeks to overcome the nature-nurture dichotomy. In the present talk, after a brief overview of the field, I will illustrate its potential by reviewing evidence for cultural variations in brain mechanisms underlyng cognition (i.e., holistic attention), emotion (i.e., emotion regulation), and motivation (i.e., self-serving bias). Implications for health and health communications will be discussed.

Shinobu Kitayama is Robert B. Zajonc Professor of Psychology at the University of Michigan. He directs both the Center for Culture, Mind, and the Brain and the Culture and Cognition Program. Over the last two decades, he investigated cultural variations in various psychological processes including self, cognition, emotion, and motivation.

Most recently, he has examined the neural basis of these cultural variations as well as their potential genetic underpinnings, with the ultimate goal of better understanding the nature of the mutually constitutive process between cultural beliefs and practices and the human brain. Before Michigan, he taught at Oregon, Kyoto, Stanford, and Chicago. He was a Fellow, twice, at the Center for Advanced Studies in Behavioral Sciences, Stanford, CA (1995–1996, 2007–2008). A recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2010, he has recently been inducted to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

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Requirements for Culture-Sensitive Health Communication – An Applied Perspective

Ülla-Karin Nurm
European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, Stockholm, Sweden

Measles has re-emerged in the EU. Socially clustered under-vaccinated groups offer conditions for evolving outbreaks. Reports show that Roma, travellers and nomadic groups are disproportionately affected as the result of a complex set of factors affecting vaccine uptake. There are population groups that are hesitant or resistant to vaccination due to philosophical or religious beliefs.

Health professionals remain to be the most credible sources of information on immunization for all those diverse groups, but often face the challenge of getting the message across. ECDC has developed a communication guide that reframes the discussion around vaccines aimed at supporting physicians advising parents with different cultural and social backgrounds to get their child vaccinated. Innovative approach of formative research was used and the guide includes ‘advice’ from the audience to healthcare professionals as an attempt to shift from a provider-centred to a beneficiary-centred approach. Cultural adaptation methodology was also developed to support the implementation of the guide in different Member States.

Dr. Ülla-Karin Nurm is a senior expert and Head of Communication Science Support Section at the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) where the main focus of her work is on risk communication, behaviour change, health communication and health promotion. The mission of the work in the EU organization is supporting the countries in their efforts to roll out multifaceted interventions and apply evidence based and innovative approaches to disease prevention. The scope of work is from providing evidence, creating knowledge, sharing experience and promising practices to capacity building on risk communication and behavioural communication, developing tools and guidance and evaluation frameworks.

Before moving to ECDC, she has been working at the National Institute for Health Developing and at the policy making level at the Ministry of Social Affairs leading the Public Health Department with a wide scope of work from health policies and strategies in in the areas of non-communicable and communicable disease prevention and control, immunization, to health promotion, community mobilization and social determinants of health.

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**Why Culture Matters in Communication, Health and Agency**

**COLLINS O. AIRHIHENBUWA**

The Pennsylvania State University, USA

The global health priority to bridge gaps in health inequity continues to remain a major challenge as new problems like obesity threatens to erase gains in lives saved over the past decades. Culture is critical in understanding the intersection of factors that influence decisions about health and behavior and the roles that ‘agency’ and ‘resilience’ play in framing communications for bridging inequity in global health.

Understanding the relationship between health and culture in domestic and global contexts could mean the difference between success and failure in promoting health and preventing diseases. Research on health and communication benefit from transdisciplinary approaches to understanding health behaviors within the contexts of culture. In this presentation, I will focus on a cultural model that has been applied to numerous community based participatory research projects that focus on health promotion, health behavior, and health communication globally.

**The Challenges of Moving from Theory to Practice: Developing and Delivering Effective Health Messages**

**ALEXANDER ROTHMAN**

University of Minnesota, USA

A key element of most initiatives designed to promote public health and well-being is the communication of health information. Yet, theory-based strategies that maximize the effectiveness of health messages have been challenging to develop. In collaboration with my colleagues, I have worked to specify how the frame of a message (gain vs. loss) may differentially influence people’s behavioral decisions.

Across a range of health domains, an evidence base has emerged to indicate that people’s response to gain and loss-framed appeals depend on how they construe a health issue, which, in turn, can be shaped by key dispositional factors. In my presentation, I will review this program of research highlighting the challenges of developing and delivering messages that fit people’s construals. Moreover, given the premise that the cultural environments in which people live shape both their dispositional tendencies and how they construe health issues, I will explore how research and theory on message framing can inform efforts to develop health communication strategies that are responsive to cultural differences.
Culturally-shaped beliefs about the self can influence people’s responses to framed health information. I present research that shows how, in the context of oral health promotion messages, cultural background influences the relative effectiveness of gain- vs. loss-framed messages. Among cultures that are typically more collectivistic, a pronounced advantage of loss-framed health messages exists in long-term oral health behavior. Among cultures that are typically more individualistic, either no advantage or a gain-framed advantage is observed. I consider the aspects of culture that may account for these findings, including acculturation and culturally-shaped beliefs about the self.
In May 2013, the Israeli Ministry of Health (MOH) confirmed the reintroduction of wild-type poliovirus 1 (WPV1) into the country. Documented ongoing human-to-human transmission necessitated a thorough risk assessment followed by a supplemental immunisation campaign/activity (SIA) using oral polio vaccine (OPV). Israel was previously polio-free and has only used inactivated polio vaccine (IPV) since 2005. The unusual situation in which ongoing poliovirus transmission was picked up through an early warning system of sewage monitoring without active polio cases, posed unique and unprecedented risk communication challenges, including:

- communicating the risk associated with a silently circulating WPV1 in a highly immunised community;
- communicating the need and urgency for public health action, particularly an SIA, despite the lack of paralytic polio cases;
- communicating the advantage of an SIA using OPV to halt WPV1 circulation, in a community already highly immunised with IPV;
- communicating the safety and risks of OPV in general and bivalent OPV in particular;
- communicating the rationale of reintroducing OPV after its use was stopped in 2005.

This talk presents the challenges and threats, considerations and specificities of communicating across Israel as the virus circulated and a national response was launched.
Cross-National Differencial Motives to Vaccinate

Gretchen B. Chapman, Meng Li, Katherine Atkins, Eric Taylor, Daniel Yamin, Yoko Ibuka & Alison Galvani
Rutgers University, USA

Vaccination protects individuals from infection but also prevents spread of the infection to others. Consequently, the decision to vaccinate can be motivated both by self-interest and prosocial motives. We examined whether prosocial motives to vaccinate against influenza varied cross-nationally.

In Fall 2013, residents of six countries (US, UK, France, Israel, Japan, China, N=500 per country) completed an online survey. We assessed the relative roles of worry about getting infected vs. spreading the infection to others in driving vaccination decisions. We also included a hypothetical scenario about a vaccine whose only benefit was protecting others from infection and assessed willingness to vaccinate when the number of others at risk of infection was small vs. large. We predicted that respondents from more collectivist nations (e.g., China) would score higher on these measures of prosocial motivation to vaccinate than would respondents from more individualistic nations (e.g., US).

Do Different Norms of Civic Cooperation Require Different Approaches to Mass Vaccination?

Benedikt Herrmann
European Commission, Institute for Health and Consumer Protection, Italy

Participation in vaccination programmes constitutes a major contribution to the public good of global health. Each additional vaccinated citizen increases the containment of infectious disease and reduces the risk of infection for the remaining population. In light of previous lab experimental research on the differences in norms of civic cooperation across Europe, we test through online-survey the reactions of individuals in different Member States with specific reference to civic responsibility for participation in vaccination programmes.
Communicating Herd Immunity in Vaccine Advocacy: A Cross-National Investigation

Cornelia Betsch, Robert Böhm, Lars Korn, Cindy Holtmann, Ulrich Kühnen & Paul Chan,
Universities of Erfurt, Aachen, Bremen, Hong Kong, Germany & People’s Republic of China

Vaccination yields a direct effect by reducing infection but also has an indirect effect, herd immunity: If many individuals are vaccinated, the immune population will protect unvaccinated individuals (social benefit). However, due to a vaccination’s individual costs and risks, individual incentives to free-ride on others’ protection also increases with the number of individuals who are already vaccinated (individual benefit).

We devise a simple game-theoretical model in order to predict the consequences of communicating the social or individual benefits of herd immunity on vaccination intentions. In Study 1 we manipulate the salience of individual and/or social benefits and the vaccination costs. Using a German online-sample, we find that emphasizing the individual benefit decreases vaccination intentions (free-riding). Communication of the social benefit reduces free-riding and may even increase vaccination intentions when the costs to vaccinate are low (prosocial behavior).

In Study 2 we communicate either the social or individual benefit in different environments (number of vaccinated individuals in the population, severity of the disease). We investigate the consequences of these communication strategies among participants from several individualistic and collectivistic countries. Our results shed light on cultural differences in the perception and behavior dependent on different communication strategies of vaccination as a strategic interaction.

Cornelia Betsch is a psychologist with a PhD from the University of Heidelberg (2006), Germany and habilitation from the University of Erfurt, Germany (2012). She works at the University of Erfurt as the scientific manager of the interdisciplinary Center for Empirical Research in Economics and Behavioral Science (CEREB). She applies judgment and decision making approach to health psychology. Her current research interests are in the fields of health decision making with special emphasis on the vaccination decision. She focuses on vaccine risk perception and risk communication and the potential influences of the Internet and Web 2.0 on vaccine decisions.

In cooperation with the Robert Koch Institute, she assesses determinants of vaccination decisions of pregnant women and young mothers. Her research is supported by the German Science Foundation. Cornelia Betsch is a member of the European Technical Advisory Group of Experts in Immunization (ETAG, WHO/Europe) and of the National Verification Committee for the Elimination of Measles and Rubella (Robert Koch Institute, German Ministry of Health).

Robert Böhm studied psychology and intercultural communication at Chemnitz University of Technology and Utrecht University. Subsequent to graduation, he became a doctoral fellow at the International Graduate College “Conflict and Cooperation Between Social Groups” as well as at the International Max Planck Research School on “Adapting Behavior in a Fundamentally Uncertain World” in Jena.

He received his doctoral degree from the Friedrich Schiller University of Jena in 2010 and then became a post-doc at the Center for Empirical Research in Economics and Behavioral Sciences (CEREB) at the University of Erfurt. Since July 2013 he is a “Juniorprofessor” (Assistant Professor) of Decision Analysis in the School of Business and Economics at RWTH Aachen University.

Robert Böhm’s research interest lies at the intersection of Social Psychology and Behavioral Economics, with a main focus on (nested) social dilemmas. He applies experimental game theory to topics like environmental protection and health behavior.


Insights from Cross-Cultural Risk Perception Research for Culture-Sensitive Health Communication

BERND ROHRMANN
Roman Research Road

In my cross-national research on risk perception processes, I investigated disparities between social groups within a country, as well as diversities across countries of different cultural background. The results show that people’s risk perceptions are shaped by five main influences: Their knowledge about the impact of a hazard; their exposure to public opinions about risks; their balancing of dangers versus benefits of a risky activity; their attitudes regarding safety versus risk propensity; and their acquaintance to social concepts and rules within their society. All these aspects need to be considered when designing a culture-sensitive health communication program, because humans are not ‘machines’, their decisions and behaviours are steered by multiple cultural factors, and they can not always be expected to be ‘rational’ or compliant. Thus connecting experiences from different social-science disciplines will be valuable.

Scientific education in Germany (psychology, sociology, linguistics). Positions as social scientist and lecturer at research institutions and universities. Then director of a social-scientific consultancy team and visiting lecturer in Austria, Switzerland, Hong Kong, Australia and New Zealand. From 1993 until 2009 with the University of Melbourne, Retired Professor, Environment Research, University Melbourne/Australia. Since 2010 operating Roman Research Road.

Main areas include: Applied social research, environmental psychology, and research methodology. Special substantive interests: Risk perception/communication/management; impacts of environmental stressors; hazard appraisal and preparedness; perception of environments; residential choice and satisfaction; decision processes and decision-aiding technologies; teaching quality. Methodological interests: Response scales, survey methodology, evaluation research, and conceptualizations via structural models.

Conducted numerous empirical investigations; strong emphasis on interdisciplinary approaches and application of findings. Cross-cultural studies in collaboration with researchers from Germany, Switzerland, Netherland, Brazil, Japan and Hong Kong. Also work as consultant with governmental agencies and industry/companies. Honorary member of The International Emergency Management Society. Lecturing at university and to non-academic audiences. Publication of ~130 articles/reports/books.

mail@rohrmannresearch.net

ROHRMANN, B. (2013). Comparisons of risk perception in different cultures: Profile and synopsis of a social science research project venture in 9 countries. Reports, Roman Research Road, Melbourne.


The Role of the Self in Responses to Health Communications: A Cultural Perspective

AYSE USKUL
University of Kent, UK

To the extent that cultures vary in how they shape individuals’ self-construct, it is important to consider a cultural perspective to understand the role of the self in health persuasion. In this paper, I will review recent research that has adopted a cultural perspective on how to frame health communications to be congruent with important, culturally variant, aspects of the self. Matching features of a health message to approach vs. avoidance orientation and independent vs. interdependent self-construal can lead to greater message acceptance and health behavior change. Discussion will center on the theoretical and applied value of the self as an organizing framework for constructing persuasive health communications.

Ayse K. Uskul, is a social/cultural psychologist whose research interests concern how different cultural settings shape social cognition, conceptions of self, and interpersonal relationships. Her current research is organized around three major themes: Socio-economic basis of interdependence, cultural conceptions of honour, and culture and health behaviour change. Her work on culture and health behaviour change integrates research evidence in social, cultural and health psychology to test novel strategies in health behaviour change, including culturally effective health communication.

She is currently an associate professor in the School of Psychology at the University of Kent. Before Kent, she held academic positions at the University of Essex and Queen’s University Belfast. Uskul’s work has been funded by the British Academy, the National Science Foundation, the Leverhulme Trust, and the Economic and Social Research Council. She currently holds a British Academy Mid-Career Fellowship.

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The Role of Culture in Response Styles to Health Survey Questions

Sharon Shavitt
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA

We examine the role that culture plays in influencing the cognitive processes respondents perform when answering health survey questions, and the consequences of these processes for specific survey response styles and context effects. Our data come from a stratified survey (N=600) of non-Hispanic Whites, African-Americans, Mexican-Americans, and Korean-Americans who were interviewed face-to-face and asked numerous questions about their health beliefs and behaviors. Analyses assess the extent to which cultural group and cultural value orientations influence the process of answering these survey questions by examining question order effects, respondent reactions to the questions (measured via coding of respondents’ behaviors from recordings of the interviews), paradata (e.g., response latencies) and moderating traits (e.g., need for cognition, need to evaluate).

Sharon Shavitt is Walter H. Stellner Professor of Marketing at the University of Illinois, and she was NIMH Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Her Ph.D. in social psychology is from the Ohio State University, and she was an incoming Associate Editor for the Journal of Consumer Research and currently serves on the editorial board of this journal and several others. Her research program primarily focuses on cultural factors affecting consumer motivations and survey response behaviors. Her research in these areas has been supported by the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and the Fetzer Institute. More recently, her work has extended into the ways gender stereotypes impact responses to gendered targets of judgment.


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Culture and Diversity of Social Networks

Tasuku Igarashi
Hokkai Gakuen University, Japan

Different cultures foster different strategies of forming and maintaining interpersonal ties. In this talk, I introduce cultural influences of generalized trust and relational self on diversity of social networks. A comparison of social network compositions between Western and East Asian countries revealed both universal and culture-specific types of network formation and maintenance strategies. Overall, Westerners had a greater number of similar ties than East Asians, which might reflect a significant cultural difference in relational mobility. For both Westerners and East Asians, generalized trust increases similarity of social network compositions, suggesting that people actively choose interpersonal ties based on their own judgment of other’s attitudes and values. Relational self was associated with social network similarity only among East Asians, indicating that emotional connectedness of oneself with similar others are induced from a same behavioral setting in East Asian contexts. The findings suggest that people need to go beyond feeling secure in their interpersonal ties to achieve network diversity.

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Call for Papers

Improving Medical Decision Making through Culture-Sensitive Health Communication

Guest Editors: Drs. Cornelia Betsch & Robert Böhm

Medical Decision Making, the journal of the Society for Medical Decision Making, encourages submissions for a special theme issue on the role of cultural differences in health communication that affect medical decision making.

It is a challenging task to communicate health-related information effectively, so that individuals are able to make informed decisions that yield the best outcomes not only for themselves, but also for society. Psychological research in health communication suggests that messages will be especially persuasive and effective when recipients' cognitive, affective, and motivational characteristics match the contents of the messages. Culture has an impact on how individuals construct their selves, how they process information, and how they judge.

The goals of this special issue are to give an overview of recent findings, to suggest future research agenda, and to reveal best practices in health communication to improve health decisions in different cultural contexts.

Relevant communications for this issue are those that address specific medical decision behaviors or outcomes. Manuscripts submitted for the special issue may address (but are not limited to) cultural differences in risk perception, persuasion, consumer or cooperation behavior in relation to health judgments and decisions. Research that examines cultural differences among the industrialized West, Asia, Africa, and other countries in the developing world is particularly appropriate. Studies of promising new information technologies that might lower barriers for culture-sensitive health communication are also encouraged.

All manuscripts are subject to MDM's usual criteria and peer review process, managed by MDM editors. There is no guarantee that any manuscripts submitted for the special issue will be accepted. If you feel unsure about whether or not the work you have in mind would be appropriate, do not hesitate to contact the guest editors at cornelia.betsch@uni-erfurt.de or robert.boehm@rwth-aachen.de.

A small group conference regarding this topic will be held on May 22nd–24th 2014 in Erfurt, Germany. If you are interested in taking part in the meeting please contact cornelia.betsch@uni-erfurt.de.

Important Dates
 Deadline for paper submissions: July 31st, 2014
 Deadline for final revised version: October 31st, 2014
 Expected publication: April 2015
We gratefully acknowledge generous financial support of our sponsors who made this meeting possible:

Sponsors

Thank you!