Social Marketing for Social Change

Matthew Wood¹

Abstract
This article explores the role of social marketing in achieving health equality and social change in the context of obesity, one of the most serious global public health issues we face today. Social marketing has traditionally taken a downstream focus, targeting individuals to change their behavior. This article takes a critical perspective, supporting moves toward upstream social marketing and applying a socioecological model to social marketing theory. At the macrolevel, the marketing activities of some companies and social–economic environment mean it is difficult for some consumers to make healthy choices—for example, food and drink. At the microlevel, there is robust evidence parenting style and quality of preschool education during the critical early years’ period of child development profoundly influences long-term health and life outcomes. Ecological models enable social marketers and policy makers to understand which interventions are likely to reduce inequality through sustainable, holistic positive behavior change compared with short-term, issue-based programs.

Keywords
social change, ecological model, early years’ education, upstream social marketing, obesity

Introduction
The purpose of this article is to highlight the fundamental impact of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) on future health and life outcomes and to consider the implications for social marketing. The positive impact of ECEC on educational and economic outcomes is well established (Campbell & Ramey, 1994). However, less well-know is the positive impact ECEC can have on health outcomes in later life, including obesity (Jones-Taylor, 2015). Early years’ interventions take a social–ecological approach to tackling social and public issues, focusing on child development within the family setting and preventative measures. Traditional “downstream” social marketing focuses on particular “issues” or individual “problematic” behaviors (obesity, diet, physical activity, smoking, alcohol, etc.) rather than their microenvironmental determinants (which are in turn influenced by wider systematic factors and interactions). This article argues a social–ecological approach to social marketing—with a particular emphasis on child development—would enable social marketers to think about social change and health improvement from a more holistic, person-centered perspective rather than focusing on

¹ Business School, University of Brighton, Brighton, United Kingdom

Corresponding Author:
Matthew Wood, Business School, University of Brighton, Mithras house, Lewes Road, Brighton BN2 4AT, United Kingdom.
Email: matthew.wood@brighton.ac.uk