

# Hot Dogs For Breakfast: How Culture and the Social Ecology Shape Intimate Partner Domestic Violence and Sexual Violence

(Developed by Deborah Zelli, Kansas Coalition Against Sexual and Domestic Violence)

## Objectives:

- To demonstrate the power of culture
- To demonstrate the cultural construction of KABBs
- To demonstrate the ways in which cultural ideas about KABBs are transmitted

**NOTE:** This exercise can double as an icebreaker. To use it in that way, simply have folks turn to a partner and ask the questions of them instead of answering the questions themselves. When the time comes, have them introduce their partner by providing the answers to the questions.

**Materials Needed:** White board or giant post-it, etc., markers

**TRAINER:** While we are all responsible for our own thoughts and actions, our understanding of the world around us is greatly shaped by our culture or social environment. The knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and behaviors displayed by each of us, from the most mundane issues, such as what color socks to wear, to the larger construction of meaning, in the form of faith or worldview, are influenced by the messages we receive from all levels of the social ecology.

Some of these KABBs are deliberately taught to us through institutions, such as schools and churches. Some are transmitted through less formal means, such as the mass media, peers, and parents. Regardless of the means by which these ideas are transmitted, they represent learned beliefs and behaviors and, as such, can be unlearned.

Let's look at an example. Let's go around the room and I'd like each person to tell us their name, what state they are from, and if you eat hot dogs for breakfast.

**ACTIVITY:** Write "Do you eat hot dogs for breakfast?" on a white board or giant post-it. Then add a yes column and a no column. Keep track of the answers as the group provides them. When everyone has introduced himself or herself, you will probably have a couple of folks (usually college-aged folks) who do eat hot dogs for breakfast, but the majority of people will answer no.

## Process the Data with the Group:

Point out how few people eat hot dogs for breakfast. Next, try to get them to see the similarities between hot dogs and other "culturally appropriate" breakfast foods. For example, ask the group how many people eat sausage for breakfast (show of hands). How many people eat biscuits or bagels or toast for breakfast? What's the difference between a hot dog in a bun and sausage and biscuits for breakfast? Most likely, you will get lots of

giggles and answers like spices, toppings, etc. for answers but keep pressing – you might get some answers like the type of meat used, etc. but ultimately, there is very little difference between hot dogs and other types of breakfast foods. As you wrap up this section, point out how little difference there is and yet, most of us would never even think of listing hot dogs as a breakfast food.

Illustrate for the Group How Ideas Are Culturally Shaped:

Ask the group how they know that hot dogs are not appropriate for breakfast. Make a list that the group can see. Examples that you might get (or want to get): my mother told me not to, hot dogs aren't on breakfast menus, they don't serve hot dogs for school breakfasts, advertisements, health classes, etc. Try to elicit responses that represent various levels of the social ecology.

After you make your list, point out that ultimately, there is no real reason you couldn't eat hot dogs for breakfast – nutritionally, it is no worse for you than, say, an Egg McMuffin from McDonalds. But, as we found out with this group, most people don't see hot dogs as breakfast food because, at some point while we were growing up, we learned that hot dogs are not breakfast food but sausage and biscuits are. Even things as basic as food categories are learned and they are shaped by culture and society through messages from all levels of the social ecology, until they become a part of our own KABBs.

**TRAINER:** Just as our ideas about food are shaped by our environment, so are our KABBs about violence. Our knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and behaviors about violence are also learned and shaped by the messages we receive from our relationships with others, our communities, and our larger society. Messages from various levels of the social ecology shape our ideas about why violence occurs, if violence is appropriate, and whom it is acceptable to use violence against. These messages come from peers who support the use of violence, from communities that do not punish the use of violence, and from our society when it suggests that one group of people is lesser than another and that the use of violence toward that group is less reprehensible than the use of violence against other groups. The good news is, though, that since violence is learned, it can be unlearned.

Now, if I asked all of you to start eating hot dogs for breakfast tomorrow, would you do it? (You will probably get lots of icky faces and murmured “yucks.”) So, even after I've demonstrated that our ideas about hot dogs for breakfast are constructed and there are no tangible reasons to NOT eat hot dogs for breakfast, most of us still don't want to do it. We've learned for most of our lives, from a variety of sources, that hot dogs are not a breakfast food, so if we want to change people's minds about hot dogs for breakfast, we'll need to find ways to send a new message, at multiple levels of the social ecology, and we'll probably have to go beyond simply educating people about why they should eat hot dogs for breakfast. Americans have pretty strong beliefs or norms about hot dogs for breakfast.

So, given what we've been learning here today, if we decided we wanted to start a “hot dogs for breakfast” movement, how would we do it? What efforts or initiatives would we use to change ideas about hot dogs?

**ACTIVITY:** Scribe for the group so the whole group can see. Make a list of ideas – for example, a media campaign (Hot dogs aren't just for ballgames anymore), a peer educator program (friends make friends hot dogs for breakfast), a school board mandate to ensure hot dogs are served for breakfast in schools, etc. When the group has a list, work through the list with the group and divide the ideas into the levels of the social ecology.

**TRAINER:** Just like our ideas about hot dogs for breakfast are culturally shaped, so are our ideas about violence. Just like our ideas about appropriate breakfast foods are given to us by messages at multiple levels of the social ecology, so are our ideas about violence. And just like persuading people to eat hot dogs for breakfast, it will take more than just education to change knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and behaviors about the use of intimate partner domestic violence.