**BSHE 504D Section 1**

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**Assignment: Each student will critique the following paper on refining health behavior theories:** [**Government’s Role in Protecting Health and Safety**](http://sfxhosted.exlibrisgroup.com/emu?sid=Entrez%3APubMed&id=pmid%3A23593978&issn=0028-4793)**. Frieden, TF (2013). - NEJM – April 2013**

Graded: 14.2/15

Dr. Frieden’s manuscript highlights three important roles of a responsible government in protecting health and safety. However, his perspective requires more examination. I will attempt to perform this examination by answering the following questions:

1. **Did you find errors of fact and interpretation?** Dr. Frieden may have misinterpreted why people are opposed to specific public health actions. In fact, these opponents not only argue against the cost and their perceived inefficacy of public action, they argue that the government has no right to infringe in their privacy. For this group, their freedom of choice overshadow the health outcomes of the people so that even if they come to realize that government actions result in better health, they may still oppose it if their rights are infringed.
2. **Is all of the discussion relevant?** The discussion regarding the smoke free laws, and calories labeling although justifiable as good health policies, do not appear to be relevant to this debate. Knowing the controversy surrounding such measures, I do not see it fit as argument to gain acceptance of government actions by its opponents. Especially when the author does not back it up with scientific evidence based on observational studies in regards to the calories labeling.
3. **Has the author cited the pertinent, and only the pertinent, literature?** Among the five literatures referenced by the author, the first four are in support of the government role. Thus, falling in line with the spirit of the manuscript. However, the fifth reference by Harsayani D. is a blast to the government and interest groups’ actions aimed at protecting health and safety by infringing personal rights to freedom of choice. In his book, Harsayani questioned: “when did we lose our right to be lazy, unhealthy, and politically incorrect?” ([Harsanyi, 2007](#_ENREF_1)). Clearly, in his opinion, people have the right to be unhealthy; this appears not to fit in the context of Dr. Frieden’s manuscript.
4. **Have any ideas been overemphasized or underemphasized?** Suggest specific revisions: The role of the government as stated in the manuscript has been overemphasized. Indeed the government plays an important role in enforcing some of these laws. However we should recognize that the government has not always been the initiator of such measures, rather, the government has led from behind for quite sometimes until the pressure from consumer advocates has forced it (the government) to take an active role.
5. **Should some sections of the manuscript be expanded, condensed or omitted?** In the manuscript, Dr. Frieden elaborated on what the behavioral economists call “hyperbolic discounting” and added that “action by democratically elected leaders may therefore be needed to protect public health over the long term”. This statement in my opinion would need to be expanded so that the reader can have a clear sense on how such leaders would act differently and why their actions would not encountered opposition.
6. **Are the author’s statements clear?** Challenge ambiguous statements: The manuscript suggests that Dr. Frieden supports the paternalistic role of the government in protecting health and safety and implies that the government is the sole entity capable to successfully implement specific public actions. He underplays the opinion of opponents by suggesting that they would change their views once they see the positive results. Then he suddenly revealed that “government action need not consist solely of mandates”. He went on to explain how micronutrient fortification of food has often been accomplished through voluntary industry actions. This raises ambiguity as it is no longer clear if the author is still suggesting that the government has the sole responsibility to protect health and safety.
7. **What underlying assumptions does the author have?** The author has the underlying assumption that all government actions to protect health and safety are successful and people only oppose it because they don’t see the result. Therefore, any resistance to such action by the people would be dissolved once the success becomes apparent. He tends to underestimate the importance that some people may give to their right to freedom of choice, and believes that the paternalistic role of the government should be justifiable to impose any action against people will.
8. **Has the author been objective in his discussion of the topic?** Dr. Frieden cited areas where the government is uniquely qualified to deliver a successful program intervention. However such argument lacks specific data or evidence to support his claim. For example, the author asserted that “the elimination of nutrients Trans fats from the food supply protect people from a contributor to cardiovascular diseases”. This argument could be challenged by their opponents who can argue that no quantitative metrics or study based on the health outcomes show that Trans fats banned has improved health. ([Schleifer, 2012](#_ENREF_2)) The article only tells on side of the story and does not expose the government failure in implementing some of the measures that are deemed useful to protect health and safety, nor did the author give credit to others elements of the ecological framework without whose participation, no government action can produce expected health outcomes.

Harsanyi, David. (2007). *Nanny state: how food fascists, teetotaling do-gooders, priggish moralists, and other boneheaded bureaucrats are turning America into a nation of children*: Broadway.

Schleifer, D. (2012). How trans-fats became the healthy replacement for saturated fats. Technol Cult. *The perfect solution, 53(1):*, 94-119.